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NUMBER **104**
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Sarah LoGiudice, Organic Farmer, Lake Oswego Farmer's Market, Lake Oswego, Oregon





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And so, if you have ever dreamed of a place where you can chat up the chef who is picking out the truffles and shake hands with the lady who grew the asparagus and inquire about the weather on the river where the steelhead was caught just yesterday and then go home with a bushel of whatever you fancy, you are in luck. The farmer's market is alive and well in Oregon and inviting you to have a taste. So open a bottle of Pinot, get out your laptop and start planning your own caravan at traveloregon.com. Or call 1-800-547-7842.



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COVER

A luscious halved hass avocado.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDRÉ BARANOWSKI

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JAGUAR

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Things to do while you're alive:

- ☐ See a Broadway show, front-row center
- ☐ Celebrate Carnival in Rio
- ☐ Drink a mint julep at the Kentucky Derby
- ☐ Build a house
- ☐ Perfect a foreign accent
- ☐ Attempt to break a world record
- ☒ Invent something
- ☐ Climb Mount Everest
- ☐ Buy a round for a packed bar
- ☐ Visit the Taj Mahal
- ☐ See the cherry blossoms in D.C.
- ☐ Save a life
- ☐ Learn to survive in the wilderness
- ☐ Stand on the equator
- ☐ Ride a boat through a fjord
- ☐ Visit all 50 states
- ☐ Become financially independent
- ☐ Watch a meteor shower
- ☐ Tour MoMA with a personal guide
- ☐ See the NFL draft live
- ☐ Play Pinehurst No. 2

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While there are a million ways to enjoy the cheese Italians enjoy more than any other, we will leave you with one suggestion to get you started...



WHOLE-WHEAT CRÊPES WITH SWISS CHARD, GRANA PADANO, FRESH TOMATO AND BASIL

INGREDIENTS Serves 4

- 8 crêpes
- 6 oz. fresh ricotta cheese
- 2 egg yolks
- 1/2 pound swiss chard
- Grana Padano cheese to taste
- Pinch of salt, pepper, and nutmeg
- 2 medium-size tomatoes
- 8 fresh basil leaves

PREPARATION

1. Prepare or buy pre-made whole-wheat crêpes.
2. Cook swiss chard in salt water, drain, dry & chop it.
3. Mix together the swiss chard with the fresh ricotta, egg yolks, a handful of grated Grana Padano cheese, a pinch of nutmeg, salt and pepper. Blend well.
4. Spread the mixture onto the 8 crêpes. Close them like a small bag and place them into a buttered oven-proof dish.
5. Sprinkle the crêpes with grated Grana Padano cheese and cook in the oven at 355° F for about 15 minutes.
6. Place the tomatoes into boiling water for a few seconds. Peel them, remove their seeds and dice the pulp.

PLATE COMPOSITION

1. Place a tablespoon of diced tomato on the plate. Put one crêpe on top another and sprinkle them with pieces of two fresh basil leaves.
2. Top with some extra virgin olive oil and serve immediately.

For more information
and recipes visit
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- Preventing 25 billion pounds of CO₂ from entering the atmosphere.

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In Praise of Mr. Chicken

Sometimes the didn't-runs are just as delicious as the did-runs

THIS MAGAZINE'S WRITERS and editors encounter hundreds of extraordinary and scrumptious foods when they're out in the world researching stories. Lots of those foods are converted into equally great recipes by the talented folks who run our test kitchen. And most of those recipes end up on these pages. A few, however, don't.

What causes those didn't-runs not to make the cut is almost always unrelated to their quality. To the contrary, some of the most seriously edible foods I've sampled during my time working at this magazine evolved from recipes that never made it into print. Take, for example, the case of the recipe for delectable chicken fried steak that was recently developed by our intern Ruth Waxman; it was all ready to go into the June/July 2007 issue before we pulled it because we ran out of room. And then there was Mr. Chicken.

Last July I was in Vladivostok, Russia, where I was photographing this issue's story on that city (see "Land of Plenty", page 64). The story's writer, Sharon Hudgins, her husband, Tom, and I had just finished a lavish feast of the Russian appetizers known as zakuski when our hostess, Galina Korotkina, emerged from her kitchen bearing one of the most magnificent food creations I'd ever seen: a roast chicken that had been styled into a decidedly humanlike form.

"It's a classic Russian dish known as the

captain's chicken," Korotkina said in between giggles. "I think I'll call him Mr. Chicken."

Mr. Chicken was exceedingly tasty, but a recipe for cooking him didn't make it into this issue (we decided to run another roast dish instead, on page 73). But readers who are interested in Korotkina's plucky recipe will find it honored in a different way: at www.saveur.com/vladivostok. There you'll find it in all

its glory, along with a few other terrific recipes, including one for Tom Hudgins's excellent Vladivostok potato salad. (And fans will find Ruth's fine chicken fried steak recipe at www.saveur.com/steak.)



The captain's chicken, ready for its close-up.

SPEAKING OF HONORS, TWO SAVEUR contributors were recently given writing awards by the James Beard Foundation. Former editor-in-chief Colman Andrews received one for his article "Ireland—From Farm to Fork" (March 2006), and James Villas snagged another for

"Vive le Restaurant" (April 2006), his tribute to Manhattan's fusty but fabulous restaurant Le Veau d'Or. (Incidentally, I also received a James Beard Award this year, for a book I wrote called *Cradle of Flavor: Home Cooking from the Spice Islands of Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore* [W. W. Norton, 2006].) Around our offices at such times we like to say, Bring it on! —JAMES OSELAND, Editor-in-Chief

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FARE

News and Novelties from the World of Food, plus Book Review, Agenda, and More

AGENDA

AUGUST

1

Anniversary:

FIRST PATENT FOR SHREDDED WHEAT CEREAL MACHINE

1893, United States

Calling shredded wheat "an absolutely clean and perfect food without an equal or competitor" may have been hyperbolic, but that's how Henry D. Perky, an attorney from Holmes County, Ohio, proudly described the pillow-shaped biscuits turned out by his Machine for the Preparation of Cereals for Food, patented on this day. Perky was so pleased by the results of his invention that he opened a restaurant dedicated solely to shredded wheat biscuits, which he first envisaged as a digestive aid. By the time the company he founded was sold to the National Biscuit Company, a.k.a. Nabisco, shredded wheat was on its way to becoming an American breakfast staple.

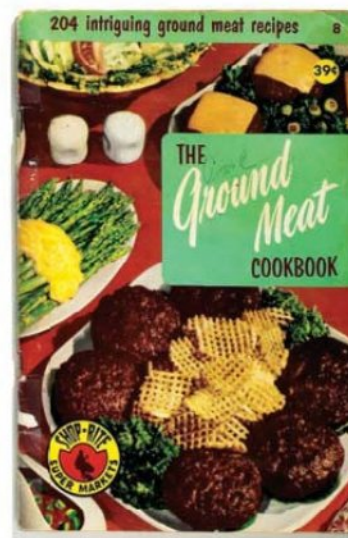
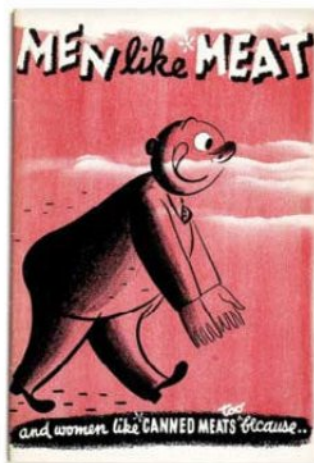
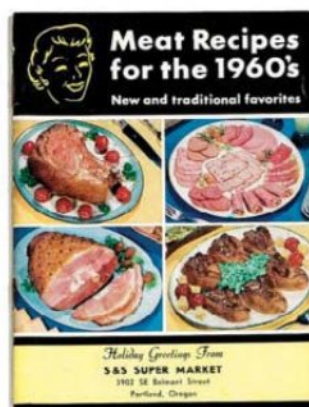
AUGUST

5

SARDINE FESTIVAL

Scala Koloni, Greece

Every August for more than 25 years, the hamlet of Scala Koloni, on the island of Lesbos, has honored the unique species of sardine that's indigenous to the nearby Gulf of Kaloni. Sample sweet and juicy Kaloni sardines grilled, fried, or served raw with fresh lemon in a preparation called



More Meat, Please

These recipe booklets take us on a kitschy romp through a bygone culinary era

DECADES BEFORE THE advent of marketing slogans like "Beef: It's What's for Dinner" and "Pork: The Other White Meat", the meat industry promoted itself through more-modest means: recipe booklets, most of which were published by the National Live Stock and Meat Board (the precursor of today's National Cattleman's Beef Association) and then distributed to consumers via their local butcher shops and grocery stores.

I came across a few of these old booklets at a flea market several years ago and soon found myself hooked. Now I've got nearly 50 of them, dating primarily from the 1930s through the '60s. Their titles read like a carnivore's mantra: *Ideas with Meat*, *Calendar of Meat Recipes*, *New Notes in Meat Recipes*, *Meat Recipes You'll Talk About*, *All About Meat*, and so on.

With their colorful cover designs, sometimes

FARE

sardeles pastes. Pace yourself—locals embrace the festivities with gusto, washing down the fish with plenty of strong ouzo and dancing to traditional music late into the night. Information: 212/421-5777.

AUGUST

5

VERMONT FRESH NETWORK'S
12TH ANNUAL FORUM

Shelburne, Vermont

This year, the theme of this daylong series of workshops and seminars—organized by Vermont Fresh Network, a nonprofit conservation group—is “Eat It to Save It: Renewing Our Farm and Food Traditions”. Held at the Coach Barn, a stately brick carriage house built in 1902 on the bucolic Shelburne Farms estate, the event culminates in a “grazing dinner” that showcases local foods raised by Vermont Fresh Network farm partners and prepared by more than 20 Vermont chefs. Last year’s fare included smoked elk, braised rabbit, and aged cheddar cheese. Information: 802/434-2000.

AUGUST

23–26

FESTIVAL DA PINGA

Paraty, Brazil

In the rest of Brazil they call it cachaça, but in this town in the country’s southeast it goes by the distinctly more mischievous-sounding name pinga (from the Portuguese word for a drop of liquid). The potent sugarcane liquor has been produced in the region since the 17th century, and every year for the past 14 years Brazilians from all over have gathered on the third weekend in August to honor, and imbibe, the spirit that has become a foundation of the city’s culture and economy. Scores of local and other cachaças will be on hand for tasting, as will hearty foods like feijoada (a complex meat stew) and churrasco (grilled meats). Information: 646/366-8162.



questionable tips (“Lamb should be served hot or cold but never lukewarm”), and occasional product pitches (one recipe calls for a can of Kingan’s Tasti-Creamed Lard), the booklets have a decided kitsch value. But they also provide a window onto a bygone era of American cooking. To flip through them is to discover a world where chicken was sometimes more expensive than other meats (hence several recipes for “city chicken”, which is cubed, breaded veal or

pork placed on a skewer to form an ersatz drumstick), where every housewife was expected to memorize cow- and pig-shaped butchery diagrams, and where meat could serve simultaneously as a symbol of affluence and of thrift (depending on which cuts you bought and how you cooked them). Meat eating could even be patriotic, as in the case of *Meat Point Pointers*, an early-1940s booklet with a star-spangled cover illustration of a smiling homemaker studying her war ration



METHOD

Sloppy Joes

A version of this recipe was published in *My Best Meat Recipes* (National Live Stock and Meat Board, 1945) under the title “Barbecued Ground Beef”. Scanning the ingredients list, we immediately recognized it as a recipe for sloppy joes. (For a history of the sloppy joe, see page 100.) Heat 2 tbsp. butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add 1 small finely chopped yellow onion and 1 small cored, seeded, and finely chopped green bell pepper and cook until softened, about 15 minutes. Add 1 lb. ground beef and cook until browned, 6–8 minutes. Add 1 cup ketchup, 2 tbsp. mustard, 1 tbsp. white vinegar, 1 tbsp. sugar, and 1/2 tsp. ground cloves. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until thick and dark, 25–30 minutes. (Degrease, if desired.) Season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Serve on buttered, toasted hamburger buns. Makes 6 servings.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



“[W]hile clams and onions last,
the chowder shall not die....”

—LOUIS P. DE GOUY, *THE SOUP BOOK* (1949)

book. The text went so far as to declare that meat consumption was “vital to the war effort”.

“They demonstrate big changes in the way we eat, no question,” says Walt Barnhart, a meat-industry consultant in Littleton, Colorado, who began his own collection of meat booklets in the 1990s and now has more than 80 titles, many of which he’s framed and hung in his office. “I started finding them at antiques shops in the Midwest, and then it snowballed and got a little out of control, as hobbies tend to do,” he explains. “The more of them I saw, the more fascinated I became, because you get to see how people viewed meat throughout history. Just look at all the recipes that call for lard!”

Speaking of the recipes, some are winners, and some aren’t. Even serious offal fans might draw the line at sweet and sour beef heart (from *My Best Meat Recipes*, 1945). Others, like the one for cherry pork chops (from *There’s Always Time to Cook Meat*, 1956), are quite good. And if you’ve always found a crown roast of pork either too costly or too intimidating, consider 1940’s *250 Ways to Prepare Meat*, which offers a nicely egalitarian solution: stuffed crown roast of frankfurters. —Paul Lukas

Don't Mess with Del

Two decades ago—and more than a few career changes back—I worked in the movie business as a writer and actor. Among my credits in the latter category was a supporting role in a 1988 independent feature film whose working title was *Hopalong and the Great Bar 20*. An homage to 1930s serial westerns, it was directed by Christopher Coppola, Francis Ford Coppola's then 26-year-old nephew. I played a character named Ferret; he was a bad guy. For me, the best part of working on the film was the shoot's location: for four months the cast and crew were put up in cabins on neighboring cattle ranches in northeastern Nevada. During rehearsals, I learned to do all sorts of unfamiliar things like ride a horse and shoot a pistol. I also learned to appreciate the kinds of down-home, Old West foods of which my suburban California childhood had deprived me. I gorged on dishes like franks and beans and molasses pie, all lovingly prepared by Del, the film's cater-

er. A Texas native in her 50s, she had bright red hair that came from a bottle ("It's called Flame," she said) and drove a dented Ford pickup. And, boy, could she cook. I used to help her out in the kitchen every chance I got. One afternoon, though, something ticked Del off—to this day, I have no idea what it was—and after she'd finished making that evening's dinner, she announced that she was quitting. She loaded up her pickup and tore off into the sunset. An hour or so later the phone rang. I picked it up. It was Del; her voice was trembling. "Jim," she said, "don't let anyone eat the three-bean salad. I put Biz in it." She was referring to the heavy-duty laundry detergent. I walked over to the salad and gave it a whiff. Sure enough, it had a faintly perfumed aroma. I tossed the entire meal into the garbage. Then I went about making the three-bean salad as I'd watched Del do it. I wanted to honor her memory the best way I knew how. —James Oseland

METHOD

Three-Bean Salad, sans Biz

This 1950s classic is a staple of picnics and salad bars. The use of canned beans is de rigueur. In some renditions, garbanzo beans are substituted for wax beans. Whisk together 1/2 cup white vinegar, 1/4 cup sugar, 1 tsp. dry mustard, and 3/4 tsp. celery seed in a bowl. Drizzle in 1/4 cup canola oil while whisking to form a smooth dressing. Add 2 chopped ribs celery, 1 cored, seeded, and chopped green bell pepper, 1 sliced red onion, and the drained and rinsed contents of one 15-oz. can kidney beans, one 14.5-oz. can green beans, and one 14.5-oz. can wax beans. Toss and season with salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Refrigerate for at least 8 hours, to allow the flavors to meld. Serves 6.

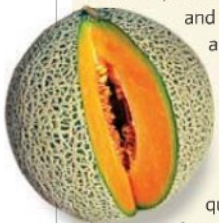


AUGUST /
SEPTEMBER

31-3

**ANNUAL HEARTS O' GOLD
CANTALOUPE FESTIVAL***Fallon, Nevada*

This town in southwestern Nevada's Lahontan Valley is the birthplace of the huge, succulent heart o' gold cantaloupe, which was developed as an experimental fruit in the 1920s and quickly gained cachet around the U.S. More than 20,000 visitors attend this annual event. Browse stalls selling local produce, sip a cantaloupe daiquiri, and cheer for your favorite contender in a pig race. Information: 775/423-2544.



SEPTEMBER

8-30

ZHONG QIU JIE*Singapore*

For three weeks, Singapore's Chinatown will be aglow with good cheer as residents celebrate Zhong Qiu Jie, or the Midautumn Festival. Originally an agrarian harvest festival, Zhong Qiu Jie is now a multiweek holiday during which friends and family pay visits to one another bearing gifts of moon cakes (elaborately molded cakes containing a preserved egg yolk that symbolizes the moon) and pomelos (large, grapefruitlike citrus fruits). After dinner on September 25, the area is closed to traffic, lanterns are lit along streets and alleyways, and local children lead a parade down Smith Street, a main thoroughfare. Information: www.visitsingapore.com.

SEPTEMBER

21-23

**NATURE WONDER WILD FOOD
WEEKEND***Cairo, West Virginia*

The woods of Appalachia have long been a forager's paradise. Every September for the past 40 years, enthusiasts have descended on this town to celebrate the region's bounty. Visitors who obtain permits in advance may take guided hikes, attend lectures, and search for wild grapes, persimmons, fiddlehead ferns, and other woodland delectables. On Saturday, there's a communal tasting; black walnut pâté, sautéed chestnuts, and persimmon ice cream are consistent favorites. Information: 304/558-2754.

FARE

Street Cred

Welcome to the Vendies, the red-carpet gala for New York's pushcart heroes

MANY NEW YORKERS will tell you that their city's most exciting foods can be found as readily under the rubberized umbrellas of street carts as they can in fancy dining rooms. But until recently the hardworking small-time entrepreneurs, most of them immigrants, who man these ubiquitous mobile eateries have labored in obscurity, struggling to obtain vending licenses and relying on word of mouth to attract loyal customers. Three years ago, the Urban Justice Center, a nonprofit legal-aid organization, decided to change that by inaugurating the Vendy Awards, a juried cook-off and

fund-raiser that honors the city's best street vendors, nominated by the public at large.

If the Third Annual Vendy Awards, to be held at the William F. Passannante Ball Field in New York's Greenwich Village on September 29, are anything like last year's event, expect outstanding food, long lines, high emotion, and, yes, even some paparazzi. The four finalists competing for glory that night had set up their carts outside the St. Marks in-the-Bowery church in the East Village and constituted a typically eclectic cross-section of New Yorkers: Maria Piedad Cano of Queens, originally from Co-

lombia, known to her customers as the Arepa Lady (after the fried cornmeal cakes she's famous for); Thiru Kumar, aka the Dosa Man, a Sri Lankan immigrant who is celebrated in Greenwich Village for his excellent lentil-rice crêpes; Pakistan-born Samiul Haque Noor of Sammy's Halal, which has earned a following in Queens for intricately seasoned chicken-and-rice dishes; and Jesse, Brian, and Dave Vendley, three California-born brothers who sell fresh, flavorful carne asada tacos from their cart in SoHo.

After sampling the vendors' fare, the nine judges—including *SAVEUR*'s food editor, Todd Coleman, and former *New York Times* food critic Mimi Sheraton—retired to the church sanctuary to deliberate, judging the food on such criteria as presentation, flavor, and portability. As the nominees gathered in front of a stage set up at one end of the room and guests poured in, the Reverend Billy, a self-described street preacher and longtime fixture in the East Village, delivered a spirited sermon. "My body and soul are what I have eaten!" he shouted with evangelical bombast. "And what I have eaten comes from the street vendors of New York City!" The Dosa Man grinned nervously; the Arepa Lady stood poker-faced.

Finally, Sheraton took the stage and announced the winner: Sammy's Halal of Jackson Heights, Queens. Samiul Noor received his trophy graciously. "This is the first time I've ever won anything," he said, leaning into the microphone and brandishing the silver cup before a sea of flashing cameras. "I love New York!" —David McAninch





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SEMISWEET

BOOK REVIEWS

Still Sterling at 25

A breakthrough cookbook celebrates a quarter century of American eating

BY BRYAN MILLER

IN JULY 1977, on a then tawdry stretch of Columbus Avenue on Manhattan's Upper West Side, an advertising executive named Julie Rosso and a graphic designer named Sheila Lukins opened a vest-pocket specialty food shop called the Silver Palate. A little more than a month later, amid the warehouses of SoHo, a publishing executive named Joel Dean and a cheese merchant named Giorgio DeLuca opened another, larger gourmet emporium. Both enterprises went on to garner national fame, spawning profitable catering divisions and lines of prepared foods. And both eventually published cookbooks. Which book do you remember?

Since its publication in 1982, *The Silver Palate Cookbook* has become a culinary-publishing

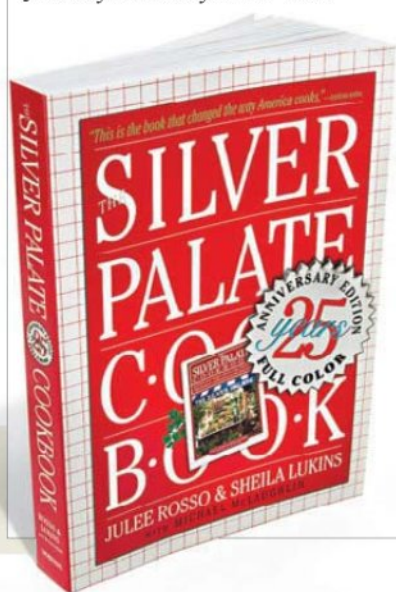
BRYAN MILLER reviewed *The Professional Chef* and profiled chef Thomas Keller for *SAVEUR*'s January/February 2007 issue.



phenomenon; to date more than 2.3 million copies have been sold. That number will surely spike now that Workman Publishing has come out with an updated and more amply illustrated 25th-anniversary edition. Though a dozen or so new recipes have been added and others have been tweaked to make them reflect contemporary tastes more clearly, the new edition is basically the same quirky, unpretentious, and eminently usable volume that first charmed readers more than two decades ago. Even for the under-40 set, the book remains a fun and eccentric read, enlivened with bright commentary and colorful sidebars on things like sea salt and foie gras. The new edition will strike a chord with readers for many of the same reasons it did a quarter of a century ago.

While the new edition of *The Silver Palate Cookbook* still includes what some cooks will deem post-nouvelle cuisine relics, such as blueberry mayonnaise and lamb chops with kiwis, there is a timeless appeal to the authors' overall editorial approach: that is, to combine sophisticated but not overcomplicated classic recipes like the ones for cassoulet (theirs is a fine rendition) and herbed caviar roulades with nostalgic American fare like pot roast and carrot cake (also an outstanding

Oven-roasted plum tomatoes, a typically elegant yet easy dish from *The Silver Palate Cookbook*.



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FARE

version). It was a smart idea, even if it wasn't strategically conceived.

"Strategy? We were too naïve to have a strategy," Sheila Lukins said recently in an interview. "We just wanted a book that had good food—sort of 'mom' food with a flair—and wasn't pedantic." Whatever the authors' intent, Lukins (a *SAVEUR* consulting editor) and Rosso inarguably benefited from felicitous timing, coming out with a cookbook that responded to the tenor of the times. The two opened their retail and carryout shop at the dawn of a gastronomic age of discovery in this country. Such stores acquainted curious eaters with exciting new choices far beyond the meat-and-potatoes paradigm of American cookery, introducing them to what were then considered exotic ingredients, like radicchio, morels, tarragon vinegar, and crème fraîche. Since few home cooks had a clue as to what to do with such foods, a cookbook like Lukins and Rosso's—which contained recipes calling for everything from mascarpone to cilantro—was a godsend. (And, indeed, the latest edition of their book, despite some updating, remains a fascinating artifact of that era.)

To be sure, that first edition of *The Silver Palate Cookbook* was not the only culinary tome then available that enlightened consumers about such unfamiliar treats as tapenade; 1982 also saw the publication of Alice Waters's *Chez Panisse Menu Cookbook* and Martha Stewart's *Entertaining*. Few books at the time, however, were written with such gusto or made kitchen experimentation so much fun. Whereas most cookbooks were formally arranged by ingredients or cooking techniques, *The Silver Palate Cookbook* appeared to have been assembled at a cocktail party.

The 25th-anniversary edition, just like the first, features what seem to be randomly conceived chapters—with titles like "The Crudités Connection", "Baking in Foil", and "The Stew Pot"—that vary widely in breadth and depth. The crudités chapter, for instance, has only four recipes, but a soup chapter has 26. Curiously, some recipes yield only two portions, while others are for six or more. And while the book's freewheeling design and chatty text will hardly strike today's readers as revolutionary, at the time of the original edition's publication such a relaxed authorial voice shattered the didactic, teacher-student model followed by so many cookbooks of the era. *The Silver Palate Cookbook* is above all a dinner party manual. Many of the recipes—for pâté maison, pasta


METHOD

Oven-Roasted Plum Tomatoes

Slow-roasting tomatoes concentrates their sweetness and makes them the perfect addition to summertime salads, sandwiches, and pasta dishes. This dish (pictured on page 30) is based on a recipe that appears in *The Silver Palate Cookbook 25th Anniversary Edition* by Julee Rosso and Sheila Lukins (Workman, 2007). Heat the oven to 250°. Line a baking sheet with foil and rub it with a little extra-virgin olive oil. Arrange 12-18 halved and seeded plum tomatoes on it in a single layer, cut side up. Drizzle evenly with 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, sprinkle with 2 tbsp. sugar, and season with pepper to taste. Bake the tomatoes until they are still juicy but slightly wrinkled, about 3 hours. Transfer to a platter to let cool slightly. Just before serving, sprinkle tomatoes with coarse or fine sea salt and garnish, if you like, with small whole flat-leaf parsley leaves, mint leaves, and slivered basil. Makes 6 servings.

with lobster and tarragon, pheasant with leek and pecan stuffing—are hardly fodder for a Tuesday night supper.

Appropriately enough, then, it was the prospect of throwing a dinner party that prompted me to buy the original book back in 1983. I spotted it in a bookshop in Westport, Connecticut; the recipe for roast shoulder of veal seemed perfect for the hearty midwinter dinner I wanted to make for some friends. It called for only seven ingredients and required minimal preparation. Impoverished as I was at the time, I considered jotting down the recipe and returning the book to the shelf but chose instead to pay the \$9.99 retail price because I aspired to write a cookbook someday and, I realized, would have hated to see someone copying the results of my hard work into a notebook instead of buying my book.

The veal was a huge success, as was the delicious appetizer of leeks niçoise. I recently reprised the meal for my wife and son. Another bull's eye. In this era of lavish tomes devoted to risotto or rustic bread, this edition of *The Silver Palate Cookbook* is an uncommon bargain. So, don't even think of taking out your notebook when you see it at the bookstore. 

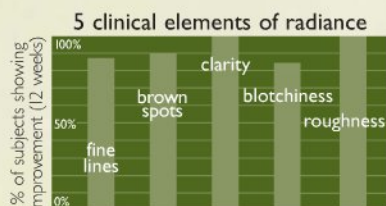
The Silver Palate Cookbook 25th Anniversary Edition by Julee Rosso and Sheila Lukins with Michael McLaughlin (Workman, \$19.95).



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THE SAVEUR LIST

6 Food Museums

The Met and the Louvre have their appeal, but these establishments are far more appetizing

IF, LIKE US, YOU TAKE a food-first approach to travel, then you're probably accustomed to arriving in a new town and heading straight to the local farmers' markets before you hit the museums. But in a few places around the world, the edibles-obsessed traveler can enjoy a curated experience that satisfies

a more cerebral sort of gastronomic curiosity. Food museums, even the most modest ones, pay tribute, often in a delightfully eccentric way (talking mannequins, anyone?), to local and regional cuisine and culture. Here are six of our favorites. (See *THE PANTRY*, page 104, for details.)

1 | SHINYOKOHAMA RAUMEN MUSEUM

Yokohama, Japan This three-story museum—cum—amusement park south of Tokyo offers yet more proof that the Japanese take their ramen very seriously. Ramen (sometimes spelled “raumen”)—the thin, wheat-flour noodles often served in a variety of hearty broths—is the subject of elaborate displays, including a richly detailed, life-size recreation of a Tokyo street scene from 1958, the year instant ramen were invented. Locally famous ramen restaurants operate branches within the museum; try the Sapporo-style ramen—in a broth of miso, cabbage, and hot red chiles—offered at Keyaki. —*Iris Brooks*



2 | THE BRAMAH MUSEUM OF TEA AND COFFEE

London, England Museum founder Edward Bramah has spent the past 50 years as a tea planter, taster, and coffee-pot designer, and many of the artifacts he has collected are displayed in this cozy museum in London's Bankside neighborhood. You'll find maps of tea trading routes from the 1950s, antique coffee-pots, and what the curators claim is the world's largest tea-pot (it's capable of brewing 800

cups at once). The museum offers seminars, tastings, and walking tours that explore subjects like the history of British tea auctions. —*I.B.*

3 | THE JELL-O MUSEUM

Le Roy, New York It was in this small town near Rochester that the powdered, sweetened gelatin trademarked as Jell-O was invented, in 1897 (and produced until 1964). Curated by the local historical society and housed in a building that once served as the town's high school, the collection includes cookbooks (take a peek at 1924's *Polly Put the Kettle On We'll All Make Jell-O*, designed by illustrator Maxfield Parrish), molds whimsically shaped like lobsters and chickens, and paintings that served as the original art for 1920s advertisements. Together, the displays colorfully chart the evolution of Jell-O from its beginnings as a cough remedy to its triumph as an all-American dessert. —*Dana Bowen*

4 | PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND POTATO

MUSEUM O'Leary, Prince Edward Island

It's the smallest of Canada's provinces, but Prince Edward Island produces more potatoes than any other (over 2 billion pounds last year). And, as a visit to this 7,000-square-foot museum proves, locals are darned proud of that fact. A 14-foot-tall replica of a russet burbank potato stands sentinel outside the entrance, and visitors can, among other things, peruse the Potato Hall of Fame (which honors local growers, inspectors, and researchers), listen to a recording of the popular 1970s folk song “Bud the Spud”, and brush up on their potato trivia (bet you didn't know that France's Louis XVI wore potato blossoms in his buttonholes). —*I.B.*



5 | NEW ENGLAND MAPLE MUSEUM

Pittsford, Vermont Maple sugaring has been a thriving enterprise in Vermont since the late 1800s, and today the state turns out 500,000 gallons of maple syrup annually, making it the largest producer in the United



6 | MUSEUM DER BROTKULTUR

Ulm, Germany Devoted to the social, historical, and cultural context of bread and bread making around the world, this museum is located in a 16th-century edifice once used as a grain and salt storehouse. Among the 700 objects permanently on display (16,000 more are stored in various locations for research) are an Egyptian wood sculpture from 2040 B.C. of a woman working a milling stone; artifacts from 18th-century German baking guilds; and an art collection including original work by Rembrandt and Man Ray's *Pain Peint*, a sculpture of a baguette painted bright blue. —*I.B.*

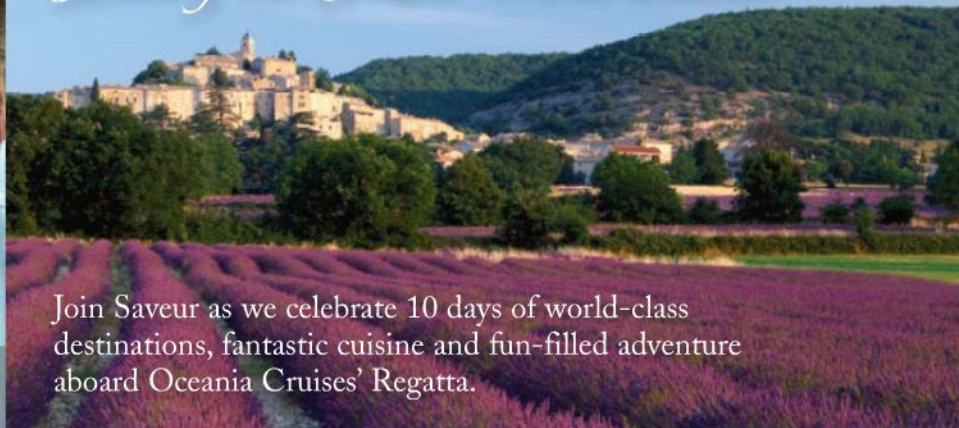


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CELLAR

Chill Factor

The wines of Chablis bring out chardonnay's austere side

BY PAUL LUKACS

DRINKING THE wines made in and around the little French town of Chablis can be an eye-opening experience for devotees of chardonnay. Even if these taut, crisp wines, made exclusively from that grape, are drunk unchilled, they somehow manage to provoke a pleasant shiver on the palate.

Located some 110 miles south-east of Paris, Chablis is the farthest north that chardonnay can yield good still wines. As a result, true chablis has little in common with the blowsy, tropical-flavored, and often oak-dominated chardonnays made in other parts of the world. Nor does it much resemble the famously elegant chardonnay wines of Burgundy's Côte d'Or—meursault, Montrachet, and the like—which entice with their sensuous warmth and richness. Great chablis certainly can be powerful, but there is never anything lush about it. Instead, its strength is somewhat aloof.

The source of that strength lies in the winemakers' acumen, to be sure, but also in the earth. Chablis sits on a band of Cretaceous limestone, the far side of which emerges across the English Channel in Dover's cliffs and Dorset's chalky hills. Composed largely of fossilized shells, the soil contains a multitude of minerals, and because it's porous, it permits the vine roots to penetrate the cool, damp depths. The grapes these vines produce are made into wines that often display a vaguely

metallic or stony character, a taste that locals sometimes describe as *pierre de fusil*, or gunflint.

Good chablis is slow to develop, both in the bottle and in the glass. It needs time to reveal its complexity and, with the exception of the oldest vintages, is one of the few whites that benefit from decanting. Grand cru chablis, from prized south-facing slopes, is the most tightly wound but also the most profound, and it gains character with a good five to ten years in the bottle. Bottles labeled premier cru need a bit less time; those labeled village even less. When exposed to air, even very young chablis can taste regal: dry, with citrus- or apple-tinged flavors, a hint of dairy in the bouquet, and a steely finish. Especially when compared with other chardonnays, chablis stands coolly above the fray. 🐘



Tasting Notes

Here are ten of the best chablis I have tasted recently, all from either 2004 or 2005, two fine vintages that are now available in wine shops. See THE PANTRY, page 104, for sources.

DOMAINE ALICE ET OLIVIER DE MOOR ROSETTE 2004 (\$30). Taut but expressive, this wine offers fresh apple and pear flavors enhanced by mineral-tinged undertones. It is ready to drink now, but it should evolve and improve with a few more years of bottle age.

DOMAINE CHRISTIAN MOREAU PÈRE & FILS PREMIER CRU VAILLON 2005 (\$35). Though it needs time in a glass or decanter, this youthful wine displays appealing layered flavors reminiscent of crisp apples and minerals, with a hint of sea salt. Incidentally, that suggestive saline note is what makes many chablis so good for drinking alongside fresh shellfish.

DOMAINE DENIS POMMIER 2004 (\$32). Fresh and lively, with mineral-tinged secondary flavors and a long finish. Made with grapes from older vines, it is an excellent example of village chablis—though it is as good as many premiers crus.

FAIVELEY PREMIER CRU BEAUROY 2005 (\$39). Initially severe, this wine opens slowly to reveal flavors suggestive of autumn fruits, wet stones, and (odd though this may sound) fresh goat cheese. Because it is young, be sure to decant it if you want to drink it within the next year or so.

JOSEPH DROUHIN CHABLIS-MONTMAINS PREMIER CRU 2005 (\$33). The well-known Burgundy producer Joseph Drouhin offers a number of compelling wines from Chablis. This one is seductive, especially because of its green apple character and long, steely finish.

LAURENT TRIBUT 2005 (\$24). Though not even two years old, this wine displays an intriguing, multifaceted personality. For a chablis from the strong 2005 vintage, it's hard to imagine a better choice for something to drink soon.

LOUIS MICHEL & FILS GRAND CRU LES CLOS 2005 (\$71). As tight as a drum, this grand cru nonetheless displays fantastic potential. It shouldn't be opened for another five years, at which point it ought to offer a myriad of wonderful flavors.

LOUIS MICHEL & FILS PREMIER CRU FORÊTS 2005 (\$36). Bright, even bracing, but with beautiful subtlety and nuance, this wine is delicious now, offering enticing echoes of wet stones and salty minerals atop a foundation of crisp fruit. It promises to taste even better in three to five years.

WILLIAM FÈVRE "CHAMPS ROYAUX" 2005 (\$20). William Fèvre has seen an upsurge in quality since Joseph Henriot purchased the firm in 1996. The entry-level Champs Royaux has been a fine buy in recent vintages, and the 2005 tastes especially brisk and vibrant.

WILLIAM FÈVRE GRAND CRU LES CLOS DOMAINE 2005 (\$90). I find that Fèvre's premiers crus sometimes taste a little too much of oaky vanilla, but this grand cru has sufficient stuffing to offset any barrel influence. Just beginning to open, it has the potential to evolve into a very special wine. —P.L.



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DRINK

American All-Star

Root beer, once the king of soft drinks, still inspires ranks of passionate devotees

BY MARY ZAJAC

LIKE MANY MATTERS of the heart and appetite, my root beer obsession came on strong and suddenly. Last spring, I was driving past the old farms that sprawl across Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, when I spotted a sign pointing the way to “cold, homemade root beer”. I’m not much of a soda drinker, but my family has a history with the drink: my parents held jobs behind marble drugstore soda fountain counters in the 1950s, measuring out shots of Hires syrup and seltzer, and my mother still waxes nostalgic about the homemade root beer my grandma used to put up for special occasions in mason jars. So, I let my thirst lead me down a long dirt driveway to a wooden stand tended by a woman in Amish dress, named Naomi Fisher, who proffered a clear glass bottle of black-as-night liquid.

I twisted off the cap and took a sip. Complex in flavor, slightly fizzy, and not too sweet, with a deep, breadly aroma and a distinct bite, the drink was utterly unlike the store-bought root beers I’d come to know. Yet it instantly evoked in me the most vivid childhood memories: of the red plastic glasses of root beer at Pappy’s, the local pizza parlor on Joppa Road in my hometown of Baltimore; of the fountain root beer served

over tiny ice chips at the Hillendale Bowling Center nearby; and of the floats I made as a kid at home with my dad, pouring the local brand of root beer over Sealtest vanilla ice cream until froth flowed down the outside of the glass like sweet lava.

When I inquired about Fisher’s recipe, I realized that she makes root beer the same, simple way my grandmother did. She starts with a bottle of root beer extract—a concentrated mixture of various aromatic root oils and other flavorings—and blends it with sugar, a little powdered yeast, and plenty of lukewarm water; then she puts the concoction into bottles, capping them with special tops to allow the gas created by fermentation to escape, and lets the beverage steep for several days. I left the Fisher farm with a jug of root beer in the backseat, a bottle of extract, and an acute desire to plunge deeper into the history of this fabled American beverage.

ROOT BEER MAY BE as American as apple pie, but, I learned, it stems from the old English traditional “small beer”, a fermented drink that has enough alcohol (typically 2.5 percent or less) to kill the bacteria once commonly found in drinking water but not enough to cause intoxication. Small beers

were made with spruce, birch, and other flavorings in England, but American settlers expanded their recipes to include other aromatic roots and barks of local plants and trees—sassafras, sarsaparilla, licorice, dandelion, and wintergreen, among others—some of which were often used in medicinal teas. By the late 1800s, these “root beers” had become widely popular as healthful tonics.

When a Philadelphia pharmacist named Charles E. Hires introduced his own, sassafras-based drink (which he first called an “herb tea”) at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, Americans embraced his packet of dried roots and herbs, which they could brew into a refreshing, bubbly beverage at home using yeast. In 1884, when he brought out a syrup and a liquid concentrate that made root beer even easier to produce, soda fountain owners and other entrepreneurs took notice. While home brewers continued to use yeast-based recipes to create a bubbly drink, a new crop of commercial root beer makers—including Barq’s of Biloxi, Mississippi, and IBC of St. Louis—

MARY ZAJAC is a Baltimore-based writer. Her most recent story for *SAVEUR* was about Smith Island Cakes (“Eight-Story Glory,” May 2007).

A ROOT BEER time line: from REMEDY to REFRESHER

1800s | The bark and roots from sarsaparilla, sassafras, spruce, licorice, and other wild plants are brewed into teas, low-alcohol beers, and syrups, which, by the latter part of the century, are frequently sold in pharmacies and general stores as curatives and healthful tonics.

1825 | What is often considered to be the first drugstore soda fountain in the country opens, in Philadelphia.

1876 | Pharmacist Charles E. Hires introduces his mix for root beer—which he dubs “The Greatest Health-Giving Beverage in the World”—at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia. A packet of roots and barks, it has to be brewed at home with yeast for carbonation.



1884 | Hires introduces a root beer concentrate along with a syrup that can be mixed with carbonated water at soda fountains. Single-serving bottles arrive two years later.



A summer root beer run, circa 1955.

DRINK

discovered that forced carbonation achieved by means of pressurized carbon dioxide gas allowed for faster, more efficient production and yielded a shelf-stable beverage that was completely alcohol-free (an attribute that appealed to adherents of the growing temperance movement of the late 19th century).

By the time of the Depression, root beer had become inextricably associated with America's emerging automobile culture, thanks in no small part to Roy Allen and Frank Wright, who, in the early 1920s, introduced the concept of curbside service at the A&W drive-in in Sacramento (the company's first root beer stand had opened in Lodi, California, in 1919). In 1924, another drive-in, Stewart's, opened in Mansfield, Ohio, and scores of imitators soon followed. Before long, root beer had surpassed similar drinks, like birch beer and sarsaparilla, in status, beginning a reign as the king of American soft drinks that would end only with the accession of cola to the throne.

Today, most of those commercial root beer pioneers—including A&W, Hires, IBC, and Stewart's—are owned by the beverage giant Cadbury Schweppes. But a little searching revealed that small, independent root beer makers abound, and most of them, I learned, serve a deeply loyal, regional clientele. Intrigued, I recently decided to hit the road to sample their wares.

I CONCENTRATE MY search on the Midwest, acknowledged by many aficionados as a Shangri-la of delicious root beer. My first stop is the Mug 'n Bun, a drive-in restaurant not far from the famed motor speedway in Indianapolis, Indiana, that has been making root beer fresh daily from the same recipe since 1960. I pull up to a parking spot and flash my lights, and a ponytailed wait-

ress sprints to my car window. The soda she brings me a few minutes later, served in a frosty mug, is full-bodied and tangy, with strong hints of molasses, and there's a flash of anise in the finish that washes away the guilt of the Mug 'n Bun's gratifyingly greasy homemade onion rings.

From Indianapolis I drive north to Lafayette, the Indiana farm town that's home to Purdue University, to pay a visit to the paradoxically named Triple XXX Family Restaurant, which is known for its hand-ground sirloin burgers and its vanilla-tinged root beer. The owner, Greg Ehresman, explains that the 78-year-old eatery was once one of a hundred or so "thirst stations" operated around the country by the Texas-based Triple XXX bottling company. This location and another, in Washington State, are the last two standing.

I wouldn't be surprised if Ehresman bled root beer. "I used to make it every morning, standing over a 30-gallon barrel and stirring in an 80-pound bag of sugar," he remembers. Ehresman began working here in 1968, when he was 13, was made manager in 1980 when his father bought the restaurant, and, with his wife, Carrie, became an owner in 1999. Shortly thereafter, he found an old jug of the original Triple XXX root beer extract, which the restaurant had stopped using years earlier, and contacted the company to see whether that blend could be shipped as a syrup to be carbonated to order. When they relaunched the product six years ago, their root beer sales tripled.

From Indiana, I head to Chicago, where I've made a date with Gale Gand, executive pastry chef and partner at the restaurant Tru and host of the Food Network program *Sweet Dreams*. Gand started thinking about making her own root beer when she was living in England in the early 1990s and couldn't find

any in stores or restaurants. Her first batch used champagne yeast: "The results were vile," she says. Over time, however, she honed her recipe—using a heady mixture of ginger, cinnamon, and Nielsen-Massey vanilla added to root beer extract—and began serving the drink at her Chicago restaurants. She now packages the beverage (with the help of a third-generation bottler on Chicago's South Side) under the label Gale's Root Beer and sells it through a distributor nationwide. Her trick of tweaking an extract by adding new flavorings and aromatics, I find out, is a popular way for small-batch producers to customize their root beer. As for Gand's, it tastes like the best oatmeal cookie you've ever drunk.

I keep the car pointed north, bound for Milwaukee, long America's brewing capital. I sidle up to the bar that's attached to Sprecher Brewery, founded in 1985 by Randal Sprecher, a former brewing supervisor at Pabst Brewing Company. Like a number of microbrewers lately, Sprecher decided to make root beer after noticing kids tagging along with parents on brewery tours. In 2006 his root beer outsold all of Sprecher's other products combined. An animated man with hair the color of peeled gingerroot, Sprecher pours a root beer from the tap and urges me to let it warm in my hands before drinking it, "so you can taste all the complexity, all the good things that are in there". Excellent advice. The vanilla and spices bloom, and floral notes flourish. "That's Wisconsin honey," he says, beaming.

Sprecher says that he used to make his own root beer at home the old-fashioned way, using yeast and real sassafras—ingredients that have largely been abandoned in commercial production. Indeed, commercial bottlers are not allowed to use real sassafras, which was banned by the FDA in 1960 after it was found that safrole, a naturally occurring chemical

A ROOT BEER time line: from REMEDY to REFRESHER

1891-92 | The corrugated bottle cap is invented, and stronger, cheaper single-serving glass bottles become available.



1919 | Roy Allen opens A&W's first root beer stand, in Lodi, California. By 1960, there will be 2,000-plus franchises around the country.

1919-33 | During Prohibition, many breweries switch to making nonalcoholic root beer and other soft drinks in order to stay in business. Root beer regains its reputation as the poster drink of the temperance movement.

1960 | Safrole, an aromatic compound in sassafras—long the main flavoring in root beer—is declared carcinogenic and is banned by the FDA. Root beer companies resort to alternatives, including sassafras oil from which the safrole has been removed.

2000s | The popularity of microbreweries and small bottlers, as well as an increased public interest in "vintage" soft drinks, fuels a root beer renaissance.





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DRINK

compound in fresh sassafras, caused cancer in rats when administered in extremely high doses. As a result, companies often replicate the flavor of sassafras by using other natural or synthetic ingredients, including imitation sassafras oil and, less commonly, sassafras from which the safrole has been removed. The FDA study remains controversial, and many home brewers insist on using real sassafras.

As for why manufacturers have ceased to use yeast as a natural means of carbonation, the answer has as much to do with rules and regulations as it does with the well-known fact that fermented root beer is more volatile and

less consistent. "Yeast makes root beer far more complex and brings it back to a more authentic taste," Jim Koch tells me over the phone; he is the founder of the Boston-based Samuel Adams Brewery, one of the few big companies that have made a yeast-brewed root beer (the brewery used a recipe from 1790 along with brewers' notations in historic texts). "But the minute yeast is added, the root beer becomes alcoholic"—meaning that its sale must be more strictly regulated, more heavily taxed, and more carefully advertised. Such matters and others, including the predominance of corn syrup over cane sugar and molasses as the sweetener

METHOD

Homemade Root Beer

Complex and delicious, old-fashioned, home-brewed root beer (right) has deep, intermingling notes of roots, bark, and spices, set against a background of molasses. Our formula is based on 19th-century recipes culled from *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Scientific American*, and *Prairie Farmer*, with guidance from *Homemade Root Beer, Soda & Pop* by Stephen Cresswell (Storey, 1998). For a source for hard-to-find ingredients, see *THE PANTRY*, page 104. Put 1/4 oz. dried sassafras root bark (optional; see page 100 for more info on that controversial ingredient), 1/4 oz. dried birch bark, 1/4 oz. dried sarsaparilla root, 1/8 oz. dried licorice root, a 1" piece unpeeled thinly sliced fresh ginger, 1 split vanilla bean, and 2 qts. water into a medium pot and bring to a boil. Remove from heat, cover, and let steep for 2 hours. Strain root-infused liquid through a cheesecloth-lined sieve into a plastic container that has been washed well with hot, soapy water. (Discard solids.) Add 2 qts. filtered water, stir well, and let cool to 75°. Meanwhile, wash four 1-liter plastic soda bottles with hot, soapy water. Rinse well and air-dry. Stir 2 cups molasses and 1/8 tsp. active dry yeast into the root-infused liquid; cover and set aside to let ferment for 15 minutes. Using a funnel, pour into bottles, filling to within 2" of top but no higher. Screw lids on tightly; set aside at room temperature to let ferment for 12 hours. Chill for 2–5 days. The root beer's character will slowly change: after 2 days, it will taste strongly of molasses; at the end of 5 days the yeast will have eaten up more of the sugary molasses, creating a milder and slightly alcoholic beverage. When it's ready to drink, open bottles very slowly, easing the caps open little by little, to let any excess gas escape gradually. (Yeast produces a high level of natural carbonation that makes for a very fizzy drink.) Serve over ice. Makes 4 liters.



in most commercially produced root beers, are hot topics of conversation in the corners of the Internet where root beer lovers lurk.

Still, in an era when strict rules and regulations prevail on a commercial level, home innovators always thrive. Indeed, there's nothing to stop home brewers who have access to a few sassafras trees (or, at least, a mail order source) from concocting their own yeast-fermented root beer. On my way back to Baltimore at the end of my thirst-quenching journey, I'm already starting to dream up my own recipe, one that would have done my grandma proud. 🍷

THE PANTRY, page 104: Sources for the ingredients you'll need to make your own root beer and details on visiting a few of the above mentioned establishments.



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SOURCE

Mountain Beauty

Purple Haze garlic tastes as good as it looks

BY EUGENIA BONE

THE FLAVOR OF MOST COMMERCIALLY grown raw garlic is sharp and hot, which is why biting into a clove of Purple Haze offers such a delightful surprise: delicate and mild but still packing a punch, the garlic arouses but doesn't overwhelm the palate.

Purple Haze is a purple-hued garlic grown by Elsie Winne and her husband, Sven Edstrom, on their farm atop Redlands Mesa in western Colorado. This particular type of garlic has been grown in the area since the 1930s but until now has seldom been sold outside the region. Winne and Edstrom, who had been fans of it for years, purchased the farmland from the area's first commercial grower, their friend Nancy Horn, when she gave up farming in 2004.

"I thought buying the farm would be a good idea, like a big science experiment," says Winne. "I never planned to be a farmer, but now we spend all our time thinking about the garlic—and we love it."

Purple Haze is a hardneck garlic, which means that it produces a flowering stalk; hardneck garlic tends to be more difficult to grow on a large scale than the more widely available softneck varieties but often has more-nuanced flavors. Winne and Edstrom air-cure the bulbs for at least two weeks after harvesting them so that their flavor can mellow and mature. The largest cloves are set aside for the following year's plantings, and the fields are rotated every three years with other crops, including peas, so that the soil can replenish itself and remain nitrogen rich. "Garlic loves nitrogen," says Winne. "That's what gives it the oomph."

Their efforts have paid off. Purple Haze has attained rock star status in this part of the Rockies and even has its own fan club. In July, when the garlic is ready to be harvested, friends, family, and enthusiasts descend by the scores on Winne and Edstrom's farm for what the couple call garlic camp—two weeks of harvesting, cleaning, and braiding. Wages are paid in garlic, which is eaten with gusto by all present. "We fill clay pots with garlic and roast it until it's soft," says Winne. "Then we serve it with crackers, soft cheese, mustard, and pickles."

Purple Haze garlic is available beginning in mid-August and usually sells out by early fall (though this year Winne and Edstrom have doubled their production, which will likely extend its availability). It is sold packed loose in bags or in braids; prices, exclusive of shipping, range from \$12 to \$65, depending on the size of the order. To order, call 970/872-1098 or visit www.purplehazegarlic.com.



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RECIPE

Caponata

(Sicilian Sweet-Sour Vegetables)

SERVES 6

This recipe is an adaptation of one in *Cucina del Sole: A Celebration of Southern Italian Cooking* by Nancy Harmon Jenkins (Morrow, 2007).

- 2 eggplants (about 2 lbs.), cut into 1/2" cubes
- Salt
- 10 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large yellow onion, coarsely chopped
- 1 anchovy filet, chopped
- 3 ripe medium tomatoes (about 1 lb.), cored, peeled, and coarsely chopped
- 2 ribs celery, thinly sliced crosswise
- 1/4 cup red wine vinegar
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste, preferably Maria Grammatico brand (see page 104)
- 2 tbsp. golden raisins
- 2 tbsp. pine nuts
- 2 tbsp. capers, rinsed
- 12 pitted green olives, such as cerignola, coarsely chopped
- 1 red bell pepper, roasted, peeled, cored, seeded, and thinly sliced
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 tbsp. coarsely chopped basil
- 2 tbsp. coarsely chopped flat-leaf parsley

1. Put eggplant into a colander set over a large bowl; toss with 1 tbsp. salt. Top with a plate weighted down with several large cans; let drain for 1 hour. Rinse eggplant and pat dry with paper towels. Heat 2 tbsp. oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add one-third of the eggplant and cook until golden brown, 7–8 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer eggplant to a bowl. Repeat with oil and remaining eggplant.

2. Reduce heat to medium-low and add remaining oil, onions, and anchovies; cook until soft, 14–15 minutes. Add tomatoes and celery and increase heat to medium; cook until tomatoes release their juices, 5–6 minutes. Add vinegar, sugar, and tomato paste; cook until thickened, 3–4 minutes. Add cooked eggplant, raisins, pine nuts, capers, olives, roasted peppers, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook until hot. Transfer to a plate; let cool slightly. Top with basil and parsley. Serve at room temperature.



Sicilian Mosaic

Caponata is a brilliant expression of an ancient, melting-pot cuisine

BY NANCY HARMON JENKINS

SOME PEOPLE CLAIM that caponata—the luscious, late-summer antipasto made with eggplant and tomatoes—is a descendant of French ratatouille. Others insist that it's an Italian original. I hate to take sides, but when I began traveling throughout Sicily, I quickly realized that although I love the pleasingly mellow mishmash of long-cooked vegetables that is ratatouille, I absolutely adore caponata. Bold yet balanced, caponata unites the deep, complex flavors revered on this Mediterra-

nean island—including those of olives, capers, and anchovies—with vegetables at their sweet peak.

The origins of caponata are uncertain, though some speculate that its name may refer to the ancient taverns (*caupona* means tavern in Latin) where similarly marinated dishes were likely served. Others suggest that caponata began as a food for long-distance seafarers because the acidity gives it long life. Sicilians often claim Arab heritage for their most treasured dishes, especially those, like

CLASSIC

caponata, that are flavored with an agrodolce sauce (the name is a conflation of the words for sour and sweet). It's true that ingredients like raisins and pine nuts, both often used in caponata, evoke Sicily's Arab culinary traditions. But the tomatoes that are integral to the dish didn't become common in Sicily until the 19th century, hundreds of years after the last Arab ruler had left the island. As for the sweet-tart sauce, the Greeks, who were in Sicily a good millennium before the Arabs, also relished that combination.


Like many cherished dishes that have stood the test of time, caponata has inspired several variations. Some recipes call for the addition of octopus; others, for fresh mint. In certain regions, especially around the city of Catania, bitter chocolate is occasionally added, sometimes in a shower of fine shavings or in the form of cocoa powder stirred into the sauce—a legacy of the Spanish, who ruled the island for 500 years and brought back with them from the New World a predilection for chocolate as a savory ingredient. My friend Eleonora Con-

solì, a native of Sicily who lives in the town of Viagrande on the slopes of Mount Etna, once served me an opulent version that was capped with a pine nut-studded chocolate dome. She cracked open the chocolate shell with a spoon and distributed the bitter-sweet shards throughout the dish. When I asked how she came by such a recipe, she quietly replied, "My family's *monzù* [cook] has always made it this way."

The recipe offered here is one I developed after years of watching and learning from Sicilian cooks. Apart from the slow cooking of the onions and anchovies, the dish is a cinch to make. There are, however, a few useful rules of thumb to keep in mind. First, the celery should still have a hint of crunch, to contrast with the soft eggplant. Second, I recommend using tomato paste only if you can find the Italian version, known as *estratto di pomodoro*, packed in glass jars (canned tomato paste often has a tinny taste). Otherwise, substitute minced sun-dried tomatoes that have been plumped first in hot water. If you wish to experiment with chocolate,

add one or two tablespoons of grated dark chocolate when you're adding the vinegar. Sample the caponata after you've finished; you may wish to add a dash more sugar to offset the chocolate's bitterness.

Caponata always tastes better the next day, after the ingredients' flavors have had a chance to meld overnight. But be sure to allow time for the dish to come back to room temperature before you serve it: it loses its complexity when eaten cold. I like to offer caponata as part of an antipasto platter or as an accompaniment to grilled meat or fish. Slathered atop crusty bread, it's the perfect summer snack.

However you choose to serve caponata, the dish is a fine example of the complicated history of Sicilian cuisine. Like the interior of Palermo's cathedral of Monreale, with its glittering tiles laid by Muslim craftsmen, caponata is an exuberant mosaic. Each bite brings together the variegated strands of Sicily's ancient culinary history: Greek, Roman, Arab, Spanish, and, of course, Italian. 

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Taking Root

A family of Hmong immigrants brings centuries-old agrarian wisdom to California's Central Valley

by Andrea Nguyen photographs by Barbara Ries





A bowl of Chinese mustard greens soup. Facing page, top, a ripe bitter melon, whose seeds will be used for the following year's crop; bottom, John Xiong's three-year-old daughter, Diana, holding a bunch of yam leaves. Previous pages, Jenie Xiong, 13, harvesting cilantro.



H M O N G F A R M E R S

TO FIND JOHN XIONG's farm, where I am headed on this hot summer morning, one must drive past downtown Fresno, California, beyond the Wal-Mart and its vast parking lot on West Shaw Avenue, to where new tract housing gives way to lush farmland. I slow down at the unlikely sight of a group of Asian women in conical, wide-brimmed straw hats tending to manicured rows of vegetables. Figuring that I'm close to my destination, I roll down my window and ask them whether they know of Xiong's whereabouts. The women confer in a mellifluous language I instantly recognize to be Hmong (pronounced "mung", with a barely aspirated *h*). Then, in halting English, one of them tells me to follow the dirt road toward the back of their plot. "You'll see him there," she says with a smile.

As I drive, trellised rows of long beans rise up on either side of me; moments later, a yellow panel truck—Xiong's, I deduce—comes into view. I pull up alongside it and get out. Xiong, 47, a stocky man dressed in jeans and work boots, greets me with a reserve that I've found to be typical of the Hmong, a semi-nomadic people who have inhabited parts of China and Southeast Asia for centuries. We shake hands, which feels a bit awkward, so I bow slightly to communicate respect. At that, Xiong suggests we take a tour of his five-acre parcel, one of two where he grows an array of Asian produce and more. In one small field, he shows me bushes bearing six kinds of purple-green Asian eggplants; in another, strawberries are thriving.

Xiong has invited me to spend a few days with him and his family so that I can learn about California's Hmong farmers and their foodways, subjects that have fascinated me since I started buying produce years ago from Hmong vendors in San Luis Obispo, where my sister used to live. I remember being amazed by both the variety and the intense flavor of the fruits and vegetables those farmers were selling. There was just-picked daikon and snow peas, as well as unfamiliar items like whole branches of thai chiles still festooned with ripe fruits.

Together Xiong and I walk down densely planted rows of squash, including angled luffa, a vegetable that, Xiong tells me, is wonderful stir-fried. I point out how healthful everything

looks, and Xiong beams with pride. He works as we stroll; at one point he opens up a yellowed, mature bitter melon and removes its bright red seeds, casting them onto a pile of other seeds drying in the sun—stock for next year's crop.

XIONG, LIKE ALL HMONG people, is descended from an ancient ethnic group who once inhabited the fertile valleys of the Yangtze and Huang (Yellow) rivers in China and, later, the Chinese provinces of Guizhou, Hunan, Sichuan, and Yunnan. In the early 19th century, fleeing oppression wrought by the Qing dynasty, a large number of Hmong migrated southward into the remote mountainous regions of what is now Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, where they were able to live with relative autonomy as farmers and gatherers. Beginning in 1975, when the Communist government came to power in Laos, where many Hmong had eventually settled, tens of thousands of them fled to Thailand to avoid persecution. After years in Thai refugee camps, many were allowed to enter the United States, bringing little with them except their agricultural traditions, their language (which is phonetically and tonally expressed in a Romanized alphabet system), and a strong ethnic identity born of years of wandering and isolation.

Central California contains the largest concentration of Hmong in the nation; these Southeast Asian refugees constitute roughly 20 percent of the certified farmers in the Fresno area. Of a total Hmong population in the United States of about 200,000, roughly 1,200 are farmers in and around that central California city—a number that does not take into account family dependents, who often help out in the fields and at the markets. Most of Fresno's Hmong farmers share tools and equipment as well as seeds brought over from Laos, and most of them cannot afford to buy

farmland. Instead, they lease plots, frequently on land that other people don't want, either because it's located far from town or has difficult soil. Should a landowner end the lease, a Hmong farmer starts over elsewhere. This type of itinerant tenant farming is not incompatible with the Hmong's traditionally mobile lifestyle, which evolved in the mountains of Laos and other areas, where a field is worked constantly until it is no longer efficient, at which point it is left to grow fertile again while the farmer works a new piece of land.

Xiong speaks sparingly of his own past. He came to the United States from Laos 28 years ago, after having spent four years in a Thai refugee camp. For 19 years he worked in apartment maintenance and automobile repair, before deciding to return to farming. Today he lives with his second wife, Bee; his 63-year-old mother, Kia Yang; and nine children, ages three to 20.

"In Laos, we lived and farmed in the mountains," Xiong tells me, as we continue to walk between rows of vegetables. "We waited for rain to grow things. It was easy to work and pick. In Fresno, everything is flat and you have to bend over so much. It hurts when you get up."

Nevertheless, Xiong's farming methods are not dramatically different from those he learned in Laos. "I don't use pesticides or chemicals," he says. "Everything is natural." He explains that his customers—many of them Hmong immigrants hungry for familiar produce but also other Asian and non-Asian people from every economic tier—are picky about quality, so he believes that his techniques must be clean and honest. "In Laos, we grew vegetables just for the family to eat. Here we farm to sell. We have to grow a lot more and think of customers." As in Laos, Xiong works the soil only minimally

John Xiong inside his greenhouse, facing page, holding a bunch of fresh-picked basil.

M E T H O D

Zaub Ntsuab Hau Xyaw Nqaij Npuas Sawb

(Chinese Mustard Greens Soup)

For this soup (pictured on previous pages, left), the Xiongs use young, tender chinese mustard greens, which have a pleasing bite. Chinese cabbage or Western-style mustard greens or swiss chard can be substituted. Put 2 qts. water into a large pot, cover, and bring to a boil. Add 1/2 lb. Hmong smoked pork (see page 104) or smoked slab bacon cut into 1 1/2" x 2" pieces and salt to taste. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer until broth is lightly smoky and pork fat is translucent, about 20 minutes. Add 2 lbs. gai choy (chinese mustard greens; see page 104 for a source), trimmed and roughly chopped. Cook, stirring often, until greens are bright green and tender, about 5 minutes. Season to taste with salt and ladle soup into bowls. Serve with steamed rice, if you like. Serves 4.

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and, as a quick glance around me confirms, occasionally lets weeds grow freely. He farms a huge variety of fruits and vegetables, but in small quantities, and sticks almost exclusively to produce he knows intimately.

The clearest measure of the success of this approach is how good his produce tastes. I take a bite of a jicama root he's just dug up and peeled for me. The tennis ball-size tuber is too young for market, but its flesh is already crisp, refreshingly juicy, and slightly sweet. One of my favorite purchases at Hmong vendor stalls has always been fresh thai basil, but I haven't seen any on Xiong's farm. When I inquire, he walks me over to a greenhouse located at the edge of the field. Stepping into the sweltering heat inside, I'm instantly intoxicated by the heady perfume of thai, lemon, and italian basil. Then he shows me his chile plants, which look like pygmy Christmas trees decorated with a

zillion brightly colored ornaments of various shapes and sizes. I see thai, jalapeño, serrano, and italian sweet chiles and a fiery, squat Asian kind whose name Xiong can't remember. It was cultivated from seeds he got as a gift from a fellow Hmong farmer.

Xiong's wife, Bee, a round-faced woman with a cheery countenance, arrives at the farm in the late afternoon with the couple's youngest child, three-year-old Diana. Xiong playfully sweeps his daughter off the ground and onto his shoulders, much to her amusement. Later, I watch Diana and her mother, bathed in the golden late-day sunlight, dance and sing amid chest-high stalks of lemongrass, which Xiong is harvesting for the weekend market. With speed and precision, he digs up a cluster of stalks with a shovel, gathers them into bundles, trims them with a broad-bladed knife, and secures them with a rubber band. He hands me a trimmed stalk, and I bite into it, releasing its tart, citrus-like juice and awakening my appetite.

By sunrise on Saturday morning, the Xions have already set up their stall at the farmers' market in Vallejo, a Bay Area town 190 miles from Fresno. John and Bee, most of their chil-

dren, and even John's mother picked eggplants until sundown last night and finished loading the truck by midnight. Then John, Bee, and three of their children began the nearly four-hour drive to market. As the sun comes up, I watch the children, sleepy looking but alert, efficiently and meticulously stack and arrange the produce for display.

The Vallejo market officially starts at nine, but early birds start arriving sooner. At half past seven, two Filipina nurses just off from the graveyard shift buy a bagful of bitter melon vines, which they tell me they will use to make ginisang mongo, a mung bean stew. A short while later, an older man of Mexican descent who introduces himself to me as Rafael Vega carefully chooses a handful of chiles for his homemade salsa. Next, a Punjabi couple load up on okra; they're followed by a middle-aged white woman who buys a few pickling cucumbers and some bumpy-skinned Indian bitter melon (also known as karela). The Xions complete each sale with a smile and a "Have a nice day"; if a customer attempts to haggle, they remain politely silent. At half past noon, the Xions pack up and start the drive back to

Above, from left, chile-scallion relish; Bee and John Xiong preparing dinner in their Fresno kitchen; stir-fried yam leaves with red onions; 63-year-old Kia Yang Xiong and her grandson Cakou in the family's living room.



Fresno, where they will pick vegetables in the afternoon before loading the truck again for the Sunday market in San Rafael, north of San Francisco.

I ask Bee whether she thinks her children will become farmers too. She admits that farming in the United States is difficult, but she teaches her children practical Hmong traditions. “I tell them, ‘This is the first job I’ve trained you for,’” she says. “If you go to school and get good grades, you may not have to farm.”

A FEW DAYS LATER, John and Bee invite me for supper at their three-bedroom house in a working-class section of Fresno, about three miles from their closest field. When I arrive, John is sorting ingredients on the counter in their small, neat kitchen: fresh chicken wings, a top round beef steak, and pieces of locally made Hmong-style smoked pork rib seasoning called *nqaij npuas sawb* (pronounced *guy bu-AH sher*) that’s used in a number of dishes.

“It’s easy to feed a big family like ours,” John says. “We grow the vegetables and buy some meat and a big bag of rice. That’s all we need.” Indeed, (*continued on page 61*)

METHODS

Kua Txob Tuav Xyaw Dos

(Chile–Scallion Relish)

This pungent condiment (pictured on facing page, at far left) is served at virtually every Xiong family meal. Stir it into soups or stir-fried dishes, like the stir-fried angled luffa with beef (see page 61), or serve it on its own with rice. Vary the amount of chiles according to your tolerance for heat. For moderately hot results, put 18 small stemmed and roughly chopped green thai chiles and 1/2 tsp. salt into a mortar (alternatively, use a small food processor). Working the pestle in a circular motion, crush chiles and salt against the sides of the mortar until a coarse paste forms. Add 3 roughly chopped scallions (green parts only) and 1/2 cup lightly packed chopped cilantro leaves and, switching to an up-and-down pounding motion, work the pestle to combine the ingredients well, transforming the mixture into a wet, rough-textured relish. Transfer to a small bowl and serve. Makes about 1/3 cup.

Hmab Qos Liab Kib Xyaw Dos Thiab Qej

(Stir-Fried Yam Leaves with Onions)

Yam leaves are a leafy green vegetable available at most Asian produce markets (also look for bunches labeled as sweet potato leaves); they are unrelated to the tuber of the same name. John Xiong likes to add red onion to this stir-fry (pictured above, left) for the sweetness it imparts. Cut off and discard the main stems from a 1-lb. bunch of yam leaves or chinese water spinach, so that you are left with only the leaves with their small, tender stems attached. (You should have about 1/2 lb.) Heat 3 tbsp. peanut oil in a wok over high heat. Add 1 small halved and thickly sliced red onion and 1 thinly sliced clove garlic. Stir-fry quickly until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add yam leaves and salt to taste and stir-fry until leaves are just wilted and onion is crisp-tender, 2–3 minutes more. Transfer to a large platter and serve promptly with steamed rice, if you like. Serves 2.



Harvested long beans and angled luffa at John Xiong's farm in Fresno, California. Facing page, a bounty of Xiong's vegetables: top row, left to right, chinese bitter melon, cherry tomatoes, sweet peppers; middle row, left to right, opo squash, Hmong pumpkin, lemongrass; bottom row, left to right, yellow cucumbers, yam leaves, small round Asian eggplants.





John Xiong's daughters (from left) Pahoua, 15, Jenie, 13, and Maiyer, 12, holding buckets of just-picked eggplants. Facing page, John Xiong harvesting lemongrass, top; bottom, stir-fried bitter melon with chicken wings.





HMONG FARMERS

(continued from page 55) the refrigerator and cupboards are nearly bare; the only things on display are an electric rice cooker, the meat on the counter, and a pile of freshly picked vegetables. The Xionsgs own their home, which gives their lives a measure of permanence, but the décor is minimal, as if they might pick up and leave tomorrow. In fact, Bee talks eagerly about moving to Oklahoma, where John's older kids live and the family has already purchased property, to grow Asian vegetables and fruits like jujubes and persimmons.

When it comes to cooking, it would be understating things to say that the Xionsgs accomplish much with very little. While John steams sticky rice, I watch Bee pound thai chiles with salt, scallions, and cilantro to make a dish called kua txob tuav xyaw dos (koo-AH za too-AH sher daw), which is similar to sambal, the spicy condiment eaten in Indonesia and Malaysia. John samples some, taking a ball of rice, dipping it into Bee's mixture, and popping it into his mouth; he invites me to do the same. It delivers an intense jolt that is mellowed by the sweet, chewy rice.

Now Bee is using a rustic, machete-like knife to whack the chicken wings into small pieces for her favorite dish, dib iab kib xyaw koojtis qaib (dee ee-YIA gee sher kong-TEE guy), a Laotian Hmong classic made of chinese bitter melon with chicken wings. "It is a Hmong knife," John tells me. "You can use it to chop a tree or cut up meat." As an accompaniment to that dish, Bee also prepares hmas qos liab

METHOD

Dib Iab Kib Xyaw Koojtis Qaib

(Stir-Fried Bitter Melon with Chicken Wings)


John Xiong tames the astringency of bitter melon by massaging the sliced vegetable in water until it turns cloudy. To learn more about that vegetable, see page 100. Trim the ends off of 2 chinese bitter melons (about 1 lb. total) and halve each lengthwise. Using a spoon, scoop out and discard the seeds and spongy insides. Cut each bitter melon half into 1/3"-thick slices on the bias and transfer to a large bowl. Cover with water and swish the slices around with your hands until the water is cloudy; drain well and set aside. Heat 5 tbsp. peanut oil in a wok over medium heat. Add 6 whole chicken wings (each cut into 4 pieces) and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, 8-10 minutes. Carefully add bitter melon and salt to taste and stir-fry until crisp-tender, 3-4 minutes more. Transfer to a large platter and serve hot. Serves 4.

kib xyaw dos thiab qej (ma gaw lee-AH kee sher daw tee-AH kay), a stir-fry of yam leaf, red onion, and garlic, stirring the ingredients with disposable chopsticks. Hot from the wok, the yam leaf has a substantial, almost plush texture. Bee is a fan of the ingredient, but John is not. "Here I grow it because so many customers like it," he says. For the soup known as zaub ntsuab hau xyaw nqaij npuas sawb (zow choo-AH how sher guy boo-AH sher), which is part of many Hmong meals, Bee simmers smoked pork for a few minutes in an aluminum pot; then she grabs a bunch of chinese mustard leaves, twists them vigorously to tear them in half, and drops them into the pot. A short while later she gives me a taste: the meat's smoky richness perfectly balances the greens' tangy bite.

As his children start to come home from school, John minces top round to use in a dish called xwbkuab kib xyaw nqaij nyug (sin-QUA kee sher gigh nee-U), stir-fried angled luffa with beef. "The kids like my cooking more than hers," John says loudly enough for Bee to hear. She smiles.

Maiyer, the couple's 12-year-old daughter, chimes in: "My dad is great. I learned to cook from him. Now, sometimes my older sisters and I make dinner for the family."

Finally, the family is called to the dining table, at the center of which sit a huge bowl of long-grain rice and a bowl of sticky rice. The rices are surrounded by a colorful array of all the other cooked dishes. As the meal progresses, I notice that the bitter melon dish stays at the adults' end of the table—some of the kids, born and raised in the States, do not like the forceful taste of certain traditional Hmong foods. But they set to the others eagerly. Daughter Pahoua, 15, reaches for a portion of Bee's chile condiment. Her 17-year-old brother, Chao, plucks pieces of smoked pork right out of the soup pot.

In the room beyond the kitchen, the television blares. Around the dinner table, though, there is animated talk, in English and in Hmong, of school and work. Eating contentedly, I picture similar scenes in the other houses on the Xionsgs' street and in millions of houses across the country, as the families of America sit down for their evening meal. 

John Xiong at work, facing page, top; bottom, stir-fried angled luffa with beef.

THE PANTRY, page 104: Sources for Hmong smoked pork, chinese mustard greens, chinese bitter melon, and angled luffa.

RECIPE

Xwbkuab Kib Xyaw Nqaij Nyug

(Stir-Fried Angled Luffa with Beef)

SERVES 4

Angled luffa (also called sinqua) is easy to spot at most Asian produce markets: look for a round, long, and dark green squash with tapered ends and thin ridges running its length. Select specimens that bend slightly; if they're stiff, they're probably old. The Xionsgs use a sharp kitchen knife to cut away the skin; you may use a vegetable peeler. Some Hmong cooks don't stir this dish while it cooks, but John Xiong swears that doing so releases more of the squash's mildly sweet flavor.

- 2 large angled luffas (about 1 3/4 lbs.; see page 104)
- 5 tbsp. peanut oil
- 3/4 lb. coarsely ground trimmed beef top round or sirloin
- 4 scallions, white and light green parts only, coarsely chopped
- Salt
- 1 stalk lemongrass, ends trimmed (leaving a 5"-6" piece), lightly crushed
- 2 sprigs thai basil

1. Using a vegetable peeler or a sharp paring knife, remove only the rough, ribbed green skin from each angled luffa to reveal its spongy white flesh. Cut each luffa into 1/4"-thick slices on the bias and set aside.

2. Heat the oil in a wok over high heat. Add the beef and stir-fry, breaking up the meat into small pieces, until almost cooked through, about 1 minute. Add the scallions and salt to taste and stir to combine. Add the reserved luffa and toss well. Add 2/3 cup water and stir again to combine. Cover the wok and bring to a boil.

3. Uncover the pot, add the lemongrass, and reduce heat to medium. Cook, stirring often and mashing the luffa against the side of the wok from time to time, until the luffa is very soft, 4-5 minutes. (The white inner core will have mostly melded into the sauce, leaving behind spongy, firmer pieces of flesh.)

4. Add the basil sprigs and continue stirring until they are slightly wilted and fragrant, about 15 seconds more. Transfer the dish to a shallow bowl and serve with steamed rice and chile-scallion relish (see page 55), if you like.

Greg Norman drives:

A Gulfstream G550

A Bell 407 helicopter

A golf ball 320 yards

An earthmover

A one-man multinational

The Range Rover

Himself



THE 2008 RANGE ROVER SUPERCHARGED DESIGNED FOR THE EXTRAORDINARY



by SHARON HUDGINS photographs by JAMES OSELAND

LAND *of* PLENTY

VLADIVOSTOK, ONCE A SECRECY-SHROUDED OUTPOST OF THE RUSSIAN FAR EAST, IS NOW A BUSTLING CULINARY CROSSROADS

WE CALL THIS ‘MUSHROOM RAIN,’” says Dima Nikitenko, referring to the fine mist that is falling over the Russian coastal city of Vladivostok. “Mushrooms grow quickly in this weather.” My husband, Tom, and I have just been met at the airport by Nikitenko, a local businessman in his 30s who hires himself out as a driver in his free time. With the temperature near 80 degrees on this sultry summer day, I feel as if I’d arrived in the tropics, not the southeastern corner of the vast land known for centuries as Siberia. Now called the Russian Far East, this region stretches from the North Korean border to the Bering Strait, covering an area of roughly 2.5 million square miles, two-thirds the size of the United States. Vladivostok’s climate veers from warm, muggy summers to frigid, windy winters. The last time I was here was a gelid day in late December 1994. In the darkness of that winter morning, with

the temperature at five degrees below zero, the 25-mile drive from city to airport took almost two hours, as fierce winds blew snow across the two-lane, potholed road, the same one we’re traveling on now.

“What do you want to do while you’re here?” asks Nikitenko, as he dodges maniacal drivers on the rain-slicked thoroughfare.

“We want to eat and visit the food markets,” says Tom.

Nikitenko regards us curiously in his rearview mirror, no doubt trying to gauge the sanity of two Americans who have traveled halfway around the world to check out grocery stores.

IN 1993, WHEN TOM AND I landed jobs teaching economics and communications at Far Eastern National University in Vladivostok, the only thing we knew about the city was its location, a lonely pinpoint on the extreme edge of the Russian map. Because of its strategic importance as a Soviet naval base, Vladivostok had been a closed city from 1948 to 1992, off-limits to most foreigners and even most Soviet citizens.

Seven time zones and nearly 6,000 railroad miles east of Moscow, at the nexus of the Russian, Chinese, and North Korean borders, Vladivostok has always seemed remote and foreign to many Russians, far removed from the country’s political and cultural power centers. It wasn’t long ago that conductors on trans-Siberian trains arriving in Vladivostok after their weeklong trip from Moscow used to announce, “Take your time, ladies and gentlemen; you have reached the end of the world.”

Established in 1860 by Tsar Alexander II as a military outpost, Vladi-

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VLADIVOSTOK

SEVEN TIME ZONES AND 6,000 MILES EAST OF MOSCOW, THIS CITY HAS LONG BEEN A PLACE REMOTE AND FOREIGN TO MOST RUSSIANS

vostok soon developed into a commercial port on Russia's Pacific coast. As it grew, its inhabitants came to include European Russians, native Siberians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Germans, Scandinavians, and Balts, many of whom toiled as soldiers, sailors, and workers in the fishing industry, as well as Chinese, Korean, and Japanese immigrants who came as merchants and sea-

RECIPE

Okroshka

(Chilled Russian Vegetable Soup)

SERVES 6-8

This chilled soup—a mixture of chopped vegetables and beef (*okroshka* means minced in Russian)—offers a refreshing antidote to the heat of summer. For more information on kvas, the faintly fizzy beverage that forms its base, see page 102.

Salt

- 3 medium carrots, peeled and cut into 1/4" cubes
- 2 medium red potatoes (about 1 lb.), peeled and cut into 1/4" cubes
- 16 scallions, white and light green parts only, finely chopped
- 3 large radishes, trimmed and finely chopped
- 1 large cucumber, peeled, seeded, and cut into 1/4" cubes
- 1 3/4-lb. piece boneless beef chuck, trimmed and cut into 1/3" cubes
- 8 cups kvas (fermented rye drink; see page 102) or sparkling cider, chilled
- 1/4 cup chopped fresh dill
- 2 hard-boiled eggs, finely chopped

1. Bring a pot of salted water to a boil, add carrots and cook until just tender, 3-4 minutes. Drain and let cool. Put potatoes into a second small pot and cover with salted water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; simmer until tender, about 5 minutes. Drain and let cool. Combine carrots, potatoes, scallions, radishes, and cucumbers in a large bowl. Cover and refrigerate for 2 hours.

2. Meanwhile, put beef into a small pot and cover with salted water; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cover and simmer until tender, 40-45 minutes. Drain and chill. Mix beef, kvas, dill, eggs, and salt to taste with vegetable mixture; stir well. Serve at once with rye bread, if you like.

sonal laborers. Others arrived as exiles, prisoners, or ex-convicts, often victims of tsarist Russia's—and, later, the Soviet Union's—infamous penal system. Today the hilly city that Nikita Khrushchev once compared to San Francisco has a population of approximately 600,000.

When I lived here from 1993 to 1994, Vladivostok was a city in transition. It had only recently reopened to outsiders following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Chinese traders, American Peace Corps volunteers, foreign profit seekers, and members of the emerging Russian mafia were descending on what was rapidly becoming known as the capital of Russia's "Wild East". Many of the people I knew lived in cramped apartments and faced rising crime rates, poor health care, periodic power outages, and a polluted water supply.

More than a decade later, Vladivostok still grapples with those problems, but as I wander through the familiar streets, I am astounded by the changes; I see modern apartment buildings, new roads, sparkling gold-domed churches built after more than 70 years of religious repression, and even a pedestrian zone downtown bustling with teenage girls in designer dresses and spike heels.

Moreover, I marvel at the food. Eateries and grocery stores of all shapes and sizes have sprung up: European-style coffeehouses and pastry shops, sushi bars, upscale restaurants, beer halls, fast-food franchises, and supermarkets featuring an abundance of international specialties, from American peanut butter and German pound cakes to Australian cheddar and tropical fruits.

"Someone bring me the smelling salts!" exclaims Tom as we step inside the bustling First River food market. When we last shopped here, usually for products that were scarce or unavailable in standard state-owned stores, it was an ugly indoor bazaar with concrete walls, rows of gray counters, and surly vendors, predominantly men from the Caucasus who refused to haggle over their high prices for fresh produce. On this visit, automatic sliding glass doors admit us to a brightly lit foyer centered around an oversize marble fountain. The dilapidated tables that used to be strewn around the market's periphery, bear-

ing a drab hodgepodge of goods for sale, have been replaced by modern, well-stocked boutiques that offer black and green teas, freshly roasted coffees, European candies, California wines, and a wealth of spices. Inside the market hall, I stare in wonder at the charcuterie, fine cheeses, and ready-made deli salads in glass cases. I watch a smiling Asian girl in a smart uniform pluck a perfect orange off the top of a gravity-defying stack of shiny, unblemished fruit and drop it into a new plastic bag for a customer. In the Vladivostok of my not-so-distant memory, bloody pieces of meat and muddy potatoes were thrust directly into my hands as I fumbled to find a place for them in my carryall.

BEHOLDING VLADIVOSTOK's outward transformation makes me eager to see how the post-Soviet market economy has affected the way people here cook and eat in their own homes. Since most of my former colleagues at the university have already left for their summer vacations



by the time Tom and I arrive, I enlist the help of two new acquaintances from the local academic community, who introduce me to Galina Korotkina, a longtime Vladivostok resident with a reputation as a terrific home cook.

At noon on a Sunday, Tom and I reach Korotkina's sixth-floor apartment in a Soviet-era high-rise. A stylish, sturdy 62-year-old with twinkling eyes and a ready smile, Korotkina leads us into her sleekly refurbished kitchen—complete with food processor, bread machine, two immersion blenders, and a countertop television—and proudly shows me her new, stainless-steel, European-made pots and pans.

Facing page, clockwise from top left: Vladivostok signage; clerks at a fish market; an arrangement of plastic flowers at a dacha outside the city; chilled Russian vegetable soup; a merchant at the First River food market. Preceding page, fresh raspberries, currants, and gooseberries for sale.

VLADIVOSTOK

HOSPITALITY IS MEASURED IN RUSSIAN HOMES BY HOW LITTLE TABLECLOTH IS SHOWING

Korotkina and her friend Galina Belogubova lay out the ingredients for a multicourse meal for some friends who'll be coming later in the day—though “multicourse” rather severely understates the matter.

The women begin deftly preparing the dishes for a mammoth spread that will feature 23 kinds of zakuski—the hot and cold appetizers that are the glory of every Russian feast (see “Tasting Tradition,” facing page)—followed by chicken-and-vegetable borscht, a roasted-chicken entrée, and a napoleon-like cream-filled torte, garnished with fresh berries.

As Korotkina's friends show up, Tom and

acter. In them, evidence of the city's Russian heritage (the blini, the cold salads) intermingles with Asian flourishes like the use of Korean chile powder in the baked herring.

After we've stuffed ourselves with zakuski, everyone takes a breather before tackling the soup, main dish, and dessert. More of Korotkina's friends drop by, and we adjust our chairs so that the newcomers can squeeze in. Finally, our hostess emerges from the kitchen, pulls up a chair, and unwinds with a shot of vodka, offering a toast to Tom and me as her honored guests.

Following her lead, we knock back the ice-



I carry platters of food to the dinner table in the middle of the living room. Soon the table is crowded with a dizzying array of colorful dishes: cold, mayonnaise-dressed salads composed of various combinations of potatoes, beets, cabbage, white beans, and fresh greens; paparotniki (Korean-style fiddlehead ferns sautéed with pork, onions, and garlic); stuffed eggplant rolls; bay scallops sautéed in butter and garnished with boiled jumbo shrimp; baked fresh herring; and blini wrapped around red-orange beads of salmon caviar. The dishes are emblematic of Vladivostok's culinary char-

cold alcohol in one gulp, but when she immediately proffers a second toast, followed by a third, I try an old trick that I learned at drinking bouts during my last stay in Russia, pretending to finish each shot while really taking only a sip. But Korotkina quickly catches on, looks me in the eye, downs her shot in one go, and then turns her small goblet upside down to show that it's empty.

Knowing I mustn't lose face, I follow suit, as the other guests sit on the sidelines, prudently sipping their drinks. Woman to woman, this contest continues for more than an hour,

From left, cups of tea; Galina Tarasova's grandson Iakov enjoying fried bread topped with salmon roe; the zakuski spread at Galina Korotkina's home, including caviar-stuffed blini, fiddlehead ferns sautéed with pork, cold and hot sausages, and homemade pickled cucumbers.



TASTING TRADITION

The myriad hot and cold hors d'oeuvres that traditionally kick off a Russian feast are meant to set the stage for the courses that follow, but these tempting appetizers—called zakuski (literally, “little bites”)—often end up stealing the show. Encompassing everything from caviar to cold vegetable salads, zakuski are usually consumed with shots of vodka or sparkling wine.

Some food historians trace the origin of zakuski to the ninth century, when Riurik, a Viking conqueror who ruled over the Slavic people of what is now northwestern Russia, is said to have introduced the custom of smorgasbord-style eating. Others credit the tradition to Tsar Peter the Great, whose travels across northern Europe may have initiated an era of gastronomic invention. Still others contend that the impulse to honor guests with a surfeit of goodies has always been characteristic of Russian hospitality, regardless of social class or historical period.

In the 19th century, when the Russian gentry entertained, they served zakuski on a separate table in one corner of the dining room or in a small anteroom. Diners gathered around and drank shots of vodka interspersed with bites of the artfully arranged offerings. During the Soviet era, such lavish dining was usually confined to well-connected Communist elites, but even when many foods were scarce or prohibitively expensive, humble households presented extensive zakuski spreads for weddings and other special occasions.

In post-Soviet Russia, zakuski remain an integral part of many meals. Some home cooks cover the entire surface of their dining tables with a nearly endless variety of savory and sweet treats. People crowd around, following each bite with a sip or a shot of alcohol, before beginning the cycle again...and again. —S.H.



VLADIVOSTOK

METHODS

Buterbrody

(Open-Face Herring Sandwiches)

Spread 8 slices of baguette liberally with butter. Top each slice with a piece of green leaf lettuce; arrange slices on a platter. Place 2 headless small kippered herring on top of each slice. Top each open-face sandwich with a halved cornichon. Scatter 16–18 pitted green olives, preferably stuffed with slivers of garlic, over the top of the sandwiches. Serve promptly. Serves 4.

Morkovi Po Koreiski

(Korean-Style Carrot Salad)

Coarsely grate 8 medium carrots (about 1 lb.) into a bowl. Make a well in the center of carrots; sprinkle 1½ tsp. cayenne and salt to taste into center. Heat 3 tbsp. canola oil in a skillet over medium-high heat. Pour oil into well and stir to mix cayenne and salt with oil. While still hot, stir 1 finely chopped clove garlic into oil, then toss with carrots. Add 1 finely chopped scallion; toss. Cover and refrigerate 2–3 hours or overnight. Serves 4.

Vinegret

(Beet and Potato Salad)

Heat oven to 400°. Rub 3 beets (about 1¼ lbs.) with 1 tbsp. canola oil. Bake on a baking sheet until tender, about 1 hour. When cool, peel and cut into small cubes. Cut 3 medium peeled red new potatoes (about 1¼ lbs.) into small cubes. Transfer to a pot; cover with salted water. Bring to a boil and reduce heat; simmer until tender, 4–5 minutes. Drain; let cool. Bring another pot of salted water to a boil. Add 3 carrots cut into small cubes; cook until tender, 3–4 minutes. Transfer to a plate with a slotted spoon; let cool. Add 1 cup frozen peas to water; cook for 30 seconds. Drain; let cool. In a large bowl, combine ¼ cup red wine vinegar, 1 tsp. dry mustard, and 1 tbsp. sugar. While whisking, drizzle in ¼ cup canola oil. Mix in 1 chopped small yellow onion, beets, potatoes, carrots, peas, and salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste. Chill. Serves 6.

Krevetki i Grebeshki

(Poached Shrimp and Sautéed Scallops)

In a medium pot, combine 2½ qts. water, 1 tbsp. black peppercorns, 6 smashed cloves garlic, and 1 halved lemon. Season generously with salt. Bring water to a boil and lower heat to medium; simmer for 8–10 minutes. Add 2 dozen head-on, shell-on large shrimp; cook for 2–3 minutes. Drain. Heat 4 tbsp. butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 1 lb. bay scallops; season with salt to taste. Cook until just cooked through, 2–3 minutes. Transfer scallops to a platter, arrange shrimp on top, and garnish with sprigs of curly parsley and cilantro. Makes 4–6 servings.

EATERIES OF ALL SHAPES AND SIZES HAVE SPRUNG UP, FROM PASTRY SHOPS TO SUSHI BARS

interrupted only by flutes of Russian sham-panskoe (sparkling wine) and ending when the last bottle has been drained.

THE NEXT MORNING I am certain that the blood in my veins has been replaced by vodka, but there's no time to nurse my hangover because Tom and I are joining yet another Galina—a first name apparently quite common in the Russian Far East—on a grocery shopping expedition.

An impish-looking, 60-year-old woman who works as an English professor and translator, Galina Tarasova was introduced to me by a mutual friend. Learning of my interest in Russian foods, she has arranged to have two of her nieces, Svetlana Kataeva and Elena Ivaschenko, cook a Vladivostok family feast for us, showcasing some of the region's typical dishes.

We head to one of the city's largest food stores, the Gipermarket V Lazer, a modern emporium in the heart of Vladivostok. Stocked with thousands of domestic and imported products, it's a one-stop shopping destination for anyone who can pay Western prices in a country where the average monthly income is \$395 per person. Except for the Cyrillic labels, it looks like an American supermarket. I browse the long deli counter featuring rotisserie chicken, prepared cold salads, and heat-and-eat meals, stop at the bakery for a sample of chocolate ganache-filled cake, and wander among the wine and liquor aisles selecting drinks for the party.

Next, we accompany Tarasova to the city's beach promenade at Sportivnaya Harbor, where smaller specialty stores sell fresh and frozen fish. No festive repast in this maritime regional capital would be complete without a range of seafood dishes, so we load our shopping bags with whole squid, plump sea scallops, jars of salmon caviar, and big, rosy kamchatka crab legs—the local version of Alaskan king crab.

Finally, we repair to Kataeva's large, airy apartment, in a 1980s-era high-rise near downtown. In the modern kitchen, Tarasova's nieces work together quietly and efficiently, like a pair of professional chefs, anticipating each other's need for this ingredient or that utensil.

At one end of the kitchen counter, Tom makes his "Vladivostok potato salad," flavored

with crabmeat, salmon caviar, and garlic mayonnaise (a dish he created when we lived here in the 1990s), while I shred carrots for a Korean-style carrot salad, a pungent appetizer seasoned with fresh garlic and cayenne chile powder.

I've eaten lightly all day because I know what to expect at a typical Russian meal, where hospitality is measured by how little of the tablecloth is still visible after the food has been set out. As Tarasova's relatives arrive, at least two dozen hot and cold dishes are placed on a long dining table, including crab and calamari salads dressed with mayonnaise; vinegret, a salad of beets tossed with potatoes, carrots, and peas in vinegar-and-oil dressing; shredded beets with walnuts and prunes; keta zapechenaya pod mayonezom, a baked salmon dish; and small bowls of chopped scallion greens and hard-boiled eggs to be used as garnishes.

We dine at a leisurely pace—a taste of this, a bite of that—as the aunts, uncles, and cousins in this close-knit clan mill around the room offering toasts, swapping personal stories about previous family get-togethers, and laughing at the antics of Tarasova's young grandson, Iakov, as he devours piece after piece of thick-sliced baguette, lightly fried in butter and slathered with salmon roe.

ON OUR LAST DAY, Dima Nikitenko, our driver, invites us to a picnic at his uncle's dacha, or country house, north of the city. It is not unusual for city-dwelling Russians of even modest means to own a dacha outside of town. Many of these second homes are little more than oversize garden sheds, with no running water and only the barest amenities; others are ornate two-story houses. For an increasingly urbanized Russian population, dachas are frequently seen as bastions of a more pastoral, more traditional Russian life. For Tom and me, visiting one is a chance to enjoy a few low-key meals and to reacquire ourselves with the bounty of the Russian countryside.

By the time we arrive, our appetites have been dampened by the oppressive heat and humidity—that is, until we smell the shashlyk (skewered cubes of marinated pork) cooking over charcoal on a portable grill. Nikitenko's

Facing page, clockwise from top left: open-face herring sandwiches; Korean-style carrot salad; poached shrimp and sautéed scallops; beet and potato salad.





VLADIVOSTOK


NO MATTER HOW MANY NEW SUPERMARKETS BECOME PART OF THE CITY'S LANDSCAPE, NOTHING CAN IMPROVE ON HOMEGROWN FOOD

mother-in-law has sent along some of her homemade pirozhki (savory pastries stuffed with potatoes and meat), and Nikitenko unloads the ingredients for okroshka, a cold summer soup of beef, finely chopped new potatoes, carrots, cucumbers, spring onions, and hard-boiled eggs combined with kvas (a lightly fermented beverage often brewed from rye bread).

After a long, lazy lunch, Tom and I go for a walk down a narrow path into the forest behind the little wooden dacha. Like their

ancestors, many locals still forage these fertile woodlands for the wild gems that are hidden amid the foliage—ginseng, mushrooms, sorrel, horseradish, fiddlehead ferns, berries, and nuts. As we wander and take in the scenery, enveloped by birdsong, I begin to understand why so many of my Russian friends spend their workdays dreaming of the countryside and the meals that they enjoy there, served on old wooden tables graced with jam jars full of Siberian wildflowers.

In many cases, the striking changes that have

taken place in Vladivostok represent advances over the past, but no matter how many shiny new food stores and upscale eateries become part of the city's landscape, nothing can improve on homegrown tomatoes, cucumbers, and potatoes, fresh from the dacha garden, accompanied by the aroma of shashlyk grilling over a fire. Sometimes progress needs the weekend off, too. 

THE PANTRY, page 104: A source for kvas. For additional Vladivostok recipes, go to www.saveur.com/vladivostok.

RECIPE

Keta Zapechenaya pod Mayonezom

(Baked Salmon with Mayonnaise)

SERVES 4

Mayonnaise made its way into Russia's everyday culinary vernacular in the 19th century, when it was first known as sauce provençal. In this dish (facing page), it enrobes salmon seasoned with soy sauce and transforms into a delicious, golden crust as it bakes. Cooking with mayonnaise isn't as odd as it seems when you consider that the ingredient is composed merely of oil, lemon juice, and eggs. Serve this rich, satisfying dish with roast potatoes, sautéed vegetables, or a cold beet salad.

- 1 tsp. canola oil
- 8 2" x 3" skin-on boneless salmon filets (about 2 lbs.)
- 1 tbsp. plus 2 tsp. soy sauce
- 3/4 cup mayonnaise

1. Grease an 8" x 8" baking dish with the oil. Rub the salmon filets with 1 tbsp. of the soy sauce, then arrange them snugly in the prepared dish, skin side up. Rub the salmon skin with the remaining soy sauce; cover dish with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

2. Heat oven to 425°. Remove baking dish from refrigerator and set aside to let come to room temperature for 15 minutes. Spread the mayonnaise evenly over the salmon, spreading it out to the edges of the baking dish. Bake, rotating once, until skin is golden brown and salmon is cooked through, about 20-25 minutes. Remove the salmon from the oven and set aside to let rest for 5 minutes before serving.

THE GUIDE

VLADIVOSTOK

COUNTRY CODE: 7

CITY CODE: 4232

EXCHANGE RATE: 26 rubles = \$1

Dinner for two with drinks, tax, and tip:

EXPENSIVE Over \$100 MODERATE \$50-\$100

INEXPENSIVE Under \$50

WHERE TO STAY

HOTEL HYUNDAI 29 ulitsa Semenovskaya (40-22-33; www.hotelhyundai.ru). Rates: \$230. A modern high-rise luxury hotel with well-appointed rooms, the Hyundai is centrally located near historic sites and shopping areas.

HOTEL VLADIVOSTOK 10 ulitsa Naberezhnaya (41-28-08; www.vladhotel.vl.ru). Rates: \$46-\$230. Located on a steep hill overlooking the ocean, this revamped Soviet-era hotel, the largest in Vladivostok, is popular with business travelers. Its 405 rooms are on the small side but feature simple, modern furnishings, and many also provide scenic views of the city and the sea beyond.

VERSAILLES HOTEL 10 ulitsa Svetlanskaya (26-42-01; www.versailles.vl.ru). Rates: \$212. Constructed in 1909 and restored in the early 1990s to its former, glorious condition, this small Art Nouveau building houses an elegant lobby, plain but comfortable guest rooms, and a first-rate restaurant (see Where to Eat).

WHERE TO EAT

DEL MAR 42 ulitsa Vsevoloda Sibirceva (40-56-35; www.delmar.vl.ru). Expensive. Overlooking Golden Horn Bay, this ultramodern eatery offers seafood specialties, including prawn salad, and a platter of scallops and tiger prawns served with spinach sauce.

NOSTALGIA 6/25 ulitsa First Morskaya (41-05-13; www.nostalgia.ru). Moderate. This intimate restaurant features classic Russian cuisine, including okroshka (vegetable soup with kvas) and pelmeni (a ravioli-like pasta stuffed with salmon).

RESTAURANT VERSAILLES Hotel Versailles, 10 ulitsa Svetlanskaya (26-93-52; www.versailles.vl.ru). Moderate to expensive. One of the city's finest restaurants, Versailles is notable for its seafood appetizers, including calamari, shrimp, and trepang (sea cucumbers), as well as its fish entrées.

WHAT TO DO

FIRST RIVER MARKET 13 ulitsa Ostryakova. Traditional market stalls are located in the central, street-level hall of this lively enclosed bazaar, with several smaller food stores around the periphery.

GIPERMARKET V LAZER 52-A Okeansky Prospekt. This is one of the city's largest and most modern grocery stores, with an extensive deli counter.

SPORTIVNAYA HARBOR Vladivostok's downtown beach and marina are crowded with swimmers in the summer and ice fishermen in the winter and are home to a host of food stands and outdoor cafés, as well as an amusement park and aquarium.

A photograph of a car driving through a tunnel. The tunnel has a green roof with grass and plants. The car is moving towards the light at the end of the tunnel. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

There was a time when I couldn't see the road ahead.

So I hit the accelerator,

and the whole world opened up.

My dream is to expand my horizons.

It's much brighter out here than I expected.

Starting at \$34,120.*

*MSRP. Destination, tax, title and license fees extra. As shown with optional equipment, MSRP \$39,660. **Available feature.



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LIKE Butter

The mystique of avocados, which lend depth and creaminess to countless dishes, is timeless

BY ANDREA NGUYEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDRÉ BARANOWSKI AND JAMES OSELAND

Facing page, a halved hass avocado, dressed with olive oil, lemon juice, salt, and pepper.





AVOCADOS

DON'T THINK I HAVE EVER MANAGED to leave the farmers' market near my home during the spring or the summer without a few handsome avocados in my bag. Whether they're the pebbly-skinned and buttery-tasting hass variety, the big, bright green donnie, the shiny-skinned and light-fleshed zutano, or any of a range of other cultivars that have become available in recent years, I invariably arrive home an avocado lighter than when I left the market, having sliced one open on the way and eaten it right out of the skin with a spoon.

That's how my dad, who brought my family to Southern California from Vietnam in the 1970s, taught me to eat this luxurious fruit. I remember watching him after dinner, when I was a kid, as he halved a ripe avocado, removed its slippery pit, and drizzled sweetened condensed milk into the cavity where the pit used to be. Then he'd hand the halves to me and my siblings, and we'd dig in, savoring one sweet, creamy bite after another.

For years, I thought of avocados as a dessert food. Then, in high school, I began eating at Mexican restaurants that served fresh-made guacamole, spiked with chiles and pungent cilantro, and a whole new world of flavors opened up to me. In college, I survived on what I called hippie sandwiches: slices of ripe avocado on a bed of fresh sprouts, tomatoes, and mayonnaise between slices of dense multigrain bread. And my husband, Rory, having found the most direct route to my heart, used to woo me when we were dating with avocado-filled omelettes that brought out the fruit's subtly baconlike aroma.

These days, I use avocados in countless dishes—from light summer fare like avocado and lobster salad to Japanese-American classics like the California roll—and have come to marvel at the fatty fruit's enigmatic and versatile character. Firm enough to be sliced or diced yet soft enough to be mashed or puréed, the avocado lends depth and creaminess to cooked foods, often behaving more like butter than it does like a berry, which is what it technically is. The avocado is a natural partner to fish, and it's an essential topping for Tex-Mex dishes, like fajitas, hard-shell tacos, and chili. Still, true to my roots, I crave the fruit the most often with minimal embellishment: a squirt of lemon juice, a sprinkle of salt, and a drizzle of olive oil. Adorned simply, the avocado readily offers up its pure, mysterious essence.

THE AVOCADO HAS LONG been essential to the everyday cuisines of Latin America and the Caribbean, where it is a crucial ingredient in myriad prepared dishes, such as Ecuadoran ceviche and Colombian ajiaco, a chicken–potato stew. In Mexico, avocados are often added to salsas and lend a silky note as a garnish to any number of spicy dishes, and their anise-scented leaves perfume moles and stews. In Brazil they are added to sweet mousses and shakes, Puerto Rican cuisine features them in cold soups, and Chileans fill them with picadillo, a stuffing made of peppers and ground meat.

Americans, too, have developed a prodigious appetite for avocados in recent years; since 1990, the consumption of avocados in this country has more than doubled, thanks in part to an influx of immigrants from Latin America and also to the ever diversifying tastes of Americans of all backgrounds. Today, we eat considerably more avocados than we produce, importing the fruit in greater quantities (almost 300,000 tons in 2005) than any other country in the world. There are over 500 different kinds of avocado, but the bulb-shaped, dark-skinned hass—the kind commonly raised by growers in California—is the most familiar to American consumers. Some of the lesser known, (*continued on page 82*)

RECIPE

California Roll

MAKES 7 ROLLS

According to sushi lore, the California roll (pictured, facing page) was invented in the 1960s at a restaurant called Tokyo Kaikan in Los Angeles by chef Ichiro Mashita. Mashita used avocado as a substitute for the then hard-to-find toro (fat, rich tuna belly). This recipe is based on one that appears in *The Sushi Experience* by Hiroko Shimbo (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006). For a source for hard-to-find Japanese ingredients, see THE PANTRY, page 104.

- 7 tbsp. rice vinegar
- 1½ tsp. fine sea salt
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 2¼ cups short-grain sushi rice
- ¼ cup mayonnaise
- 3 tbsp. chile sauce, such as sriracha
- 7 half sheets thick nori (dried seaweed)
- ½ cup toasted sesame seeds
- 1½ cups lump crabmeat (about 7 oz.)
- 14 4"-long sticks english cucumber (about ½" square), unpeeled
- ½ semiripe avocado, such as hass, zutano, or fuerte (see page 84), peeled, seeded, and cut into 14 slices

1. Combine 5 tbsp. vinegar, salt, and sugar in a bowl; set aside. Put rice into a fine-mesh strainer. Lower strainer into a bowl of cold water. Gently rub and toss rice in water. When water is milky white, remove strainer; drain bowl and refill. Repeat process 2–3 more times until water is almost clear. Drain rice; transfer rice to a medium pot, add 2¼ cups water, and let sit for 20 minutes. Cook over medium heat until water is nearly absorbed, about 15 minutes. Reduce heat to low, cover, and cook until plump, about 15 minutes. Uncover pot very quickly: rice should be completely transparent. If you see any dry spots, sprinkle a little warm water over them and cook for 1–2 minutes more. Remove pot from heat. Set aside, covered, to let rest for 5 minutes.

2. Transfer rice to a bowl; use a wooden paddle to gently break it up. Add reserved vinegar mixture; break up clumps, turning rice over. Push rice toward one side of bowl. Insert paddle into rice and rapidly move it back and forth, breaking up clumps and pushing a portion of rice toward opposite side of bowl. The vinegar mixture should be evenly absorbed. Using a folded newspaper, fan rice for 30 seconds. Cover with a moist kitchen towel; let cool slightly.

3. Combine mayonnaise and chile sauce in a bowl; set aside. Combine remaining vinegar and 1 cup cold water in a bowl; set aside. Wrap a bamboo sushi rolling mat tightly with plastic wrap. Top mat with 1 piece nori, shiny side down, with the long sides parallel to you. Moisten hands with vinegar water and pick up a scant cup of rice, forming it into a ball without squeezing. Place rice on nori and spread it to cover the nori, except for a ½"-wide band at the top. Sprinkle surface of rice evenly with 1 tbsp. of sesame seeds to form an outer coating. Flip nori over, placing the uncovered band of nori closest to you. Smear about 2 tsp. of the mayonnaise mixture across nori, leaving the uncovered band dry. Arrange crabmeat along center of nori and top with 2 sticks cucumber and 2 slices avocado, to form a horizontal line. To roll, pull the band of uncovered nori over the filling; lift up bamboo mat, fold it over filling, and roll forward. Hold the roll with one hand (over the mat) and pull back on the other edge of the mat with the other hand to tighten the roll. Continue to roll tightly. Remove mat and drape over roll; press it around the roll to firm it up. Cut roll into 8 pieces and transfer to a platter. Repeat process with remaining ingredients. Serve with wasabi, pickled ginger, and soy sauce, if you like.





AVOCADOS

METHODS

Open-Face Avocado and Goat Cheese Sandwiches

This delicious sandwich (pictured, page 80) was served by Mary Sue Milliken and Susan Feniger during the 1980s at their Los Angeles restaurant City Cafe. Put 1 tbsp. fresh lemon juice, 1 tbsp. freshly cracked black pepper, and salt to taste into a bowl; stir well. While whisking constantly, drizzle in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil to form a dressing; set aside. Put 4 oz. soft goat cheese, 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice, $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp. finely ground black pepper, the flesh from 4 ripe avocados, such as hass, gwen, or bacon (see page 85), and a few dashes of Tabasco into a bowl. Lightly mash with a fork; season with salt to taste. Divide avocado mixture between 12 lightly toasted small baguette halves and spread to cover each. Transfer baguettes to baking sheet and broil until just warmed through, 1–2 minutes. Top the baguette halves with tomato and cucumber slices, in any arrangement you wish. Drizzle some of the cracked pepper dressing onto each. Serve immediately. Serves 6.

Lobster and Avocado Salad

The recipe for this salad (pictured, preceding page) is from chef Jeremy Marshall of Aquagrill in New York City. Heat oven to 350°. Toss 1 trimmed peeled beet, cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ " cubes, with 1 tsp. canola oil; season with salt and pepper to taste. Wrap in a foil package. Roast until tender, about 45 minutes. Chill beets. Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil over high heat. Add four 1-lb. lobsters and cook until bright red and cooked through, about 5 minutes. Drain and cool lobsters, then twist off each tail, gently crack the shell, and remove the meat in one large piece; chill. Repeat process with claws. (Reserve knuckle meat and remaining lobster for another use.) Whisk together 2 tbsp. champagne, 2 tbsp. champagne vinegar, $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. dijon mustard, $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp. finely chopped shallots, and salt and pepper to taste in a bowl. While whisking constantly, drizzle in $\frac{1}{2}$ cup canola oil to form a smooth dressing. Toss 6 cups mesclun greens with some of the dressing; arrange in center of 4 plates. Arrange chilled beets, some grapefruit segments, and 12 hass, pinkerton, or macarthur avocado slices (see page 85) around each portion of greens. Divide lobster tails and claws between plates. Drizzle each salad with remaining dressing. Serves 4.

(continued from page 79) like the donnie, are large, smooth, and shaped like eggs; others, like the macarthur, look more like bartlett pears. The skins vary widely in thickness and can be smooth, shiny, pebbly, or leathery, and the flesh can range from pale green to yellow-gold. The flavor can be grassy, sweet, meaty, nutty, milky, or buttery, depending on ripeness, origin, and oil content. (See "Know Your Avocados", page 85, for detailed descriptions of a few standout varieties.) Avocados are also among the plant kingdom's most concentrated sources of oleic acid, a monounsaturated fat—the "good" kind—and are prized for the wealth of antioxidants they contain.

The avocado fruit, *Persea americana*, a member of the laurel family, is thought to have originated in Mexico and Central and South America and, thanks in part to conquistadores who took a taste for avocados back to Spain with them in the 16th century, was eventually propagated in other tropical and subtropical regions around the world. Today avocado orchards thrive in many countries, but the bulk of the world's commercially grown produce comes from Mexico, Indonesia, the United States, and Colombia. The fruit grows from trees that can reach as much as 55 feet in height, and it often hangs in dangling pairs, which explains the origin of its name: *ahuacatl*, which means testicle in the Nahuatl language of the ancient Aztec people of Mexico. Avocados have gone by other names as well over the years. George Washington, who has been cited as the first American to have made historical note of the avocado, wrote of encountering "agovago pairs" on a trip to Barbados in 1751. Well into the 20th century, many Americans referred to the fruit as alligator pear, likely owing to the scalelike marks that appear on some varieties' skin.

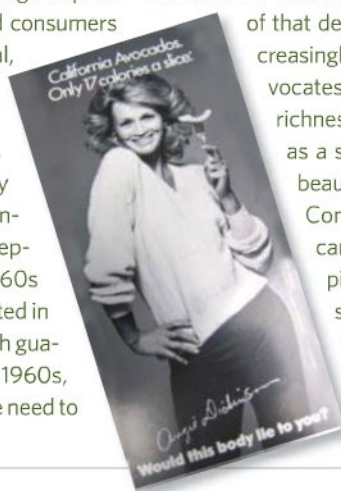
Though farmers had started growing avocados in Hawaii, Florida, and California by the mid-1800s, few American home cooks in the 19th century had heard of the fruit. Those who had generally thought of it as an exotic luxury on a par with the banana or the pineapple (also rarities at that time)—not surprising when you consider that a single avocado cost as much (continued on page 87)

LOVE FRUIT Today, they're almost as common as apples, but avocados have not always been an easy sell. In fact, it took more than 50 years of creative marketing to get Americans to embrace them. Growers—and, more important, the advertisers they hired—had to convince consumers that these exotic fruits were fashionable. How did they do it? Like any successful marketer, they hawked status, patriotism, and sex. Taking their lead from the success of the California orange industry, the avocado growers of California formed their own cooperative, in 1924. Initially, Calavo, as the organization came to be called, positioned the avocado as a substitute for meat. By the late 1920s and the 1930s, however, dieting was on the rise and salads were chic. So, Calavo began to attach new catchphrases to its product—"the aristocrat of salad fruits" was a favorite—in advertisements placed in upper-crust magazines like *The New Yorker* and *Vogue*. The advertising of avocados as a stylish and sensible

lifestyle embellishment continued through World War II. In 1943, *California Farmer*, a trade magazine, ran an ad proclaiming that "V-gardeners [would make] their salads more delightful and richer in food value" with avocados, which it called "grenades of glamour". (V, or victory, gardens were patriotically cultivated to provide food for civilians and troops.) Capitalizing on a vogue for things tropical in the 1950s, Calavo also encouraged consumers to associate the avocado with casual, exotically themed party dishes that could be served at suburban luaus; it was not uncommon to see avocados for sale in tiki-style displays in grocery stores. Such strategies contributed considerably to the avocado's emerging reputation—bolstered in the 1950s and '60s by "lifestyle" magazines and perpetuated in later years by America's love affair with guacamole—as "fiesta fare". By the late 1960s, Calavo's marketers had recognized the need to

respond to a rapidly liberalizing society and media culture. As Calavo's then executive vice president, William F. Cowan, put it in the late 1960s, "[This is] a swinging generation [of homemakers] whose demands we intend to serve." By the 1970s, advertisers were fashioning a sexy image for the once humble avocado; one ad, in *McCall's* magazine, called the food the "love fruit from California". By the end

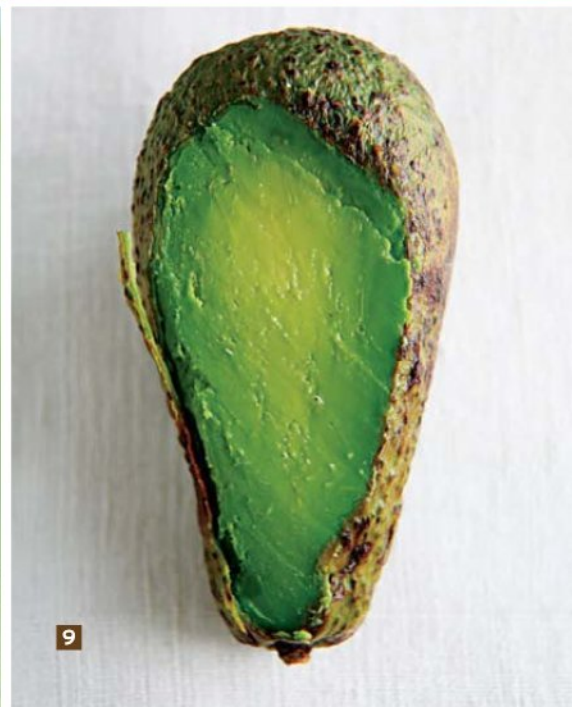
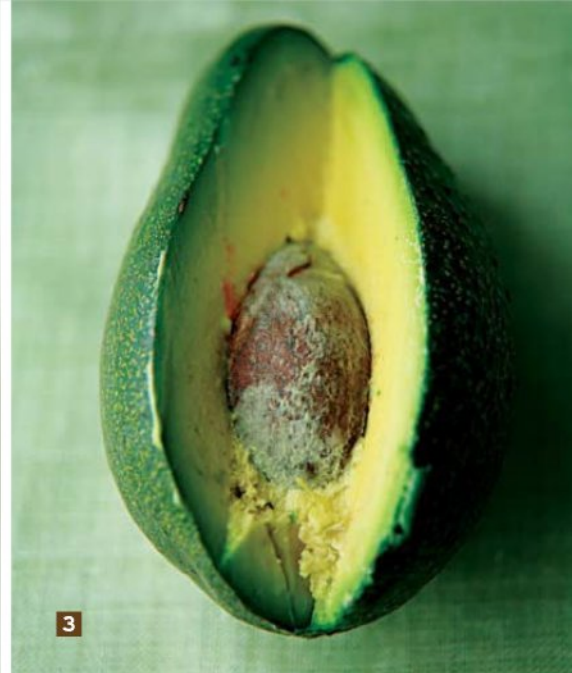
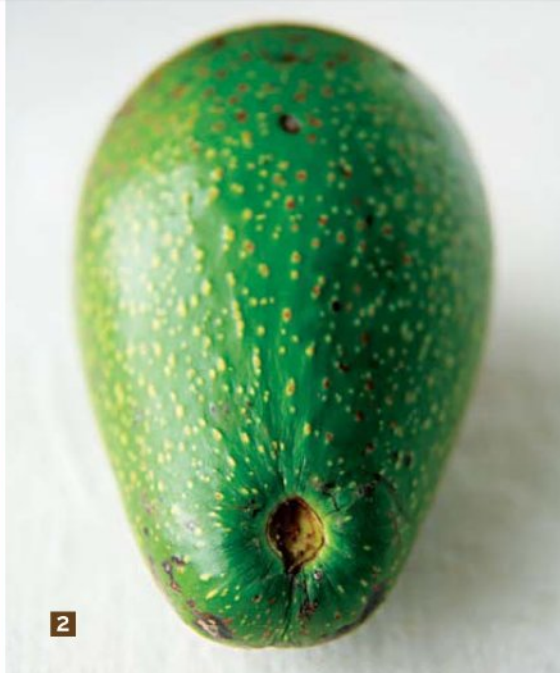
of that decade, as sexiness became increasingly associated with dieting, advocates played down the fruit's fatty richness and promoted the avocado as a smart choice for the slim and beautiful set. A California Avocado Commission print and billboard campaign from 1983 said it all: it pictured a slender Angie Dickinson beside the words "Would this body lie to you?" Avocado sales reached an all-time high. —Jeffrey Charles





STEP-BY-STEP GUACAMOLE

This recipe is based on one in *Rosa's New Mexican Table* by Roberto Santibañez (Artisan, 2007); it's for the same dish that is prepared at Rosa Mexicano restaurants in New York City. "It is our signature dish—nine out of ten guests order it," says Santibañez. "One of the things that make our guacamole special is that when we opened, in 1984, we were among the first, if not *the* first, restaurants on either side of the border to serve it prepared tableside in a traditional molcajete [a mortar made from volcanic rock]." We think it's the best guacamole we've ever had. **1** | Grind 1 tbsp. finely chopped white onion, 1 firmly packed tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro, 2 tsp. finely chopped jalapeño, and 1 tsp. salt together in a molcajete until all the ingredients are well ground. (Alternatively, use a fork to mash the ingredients to a paste in a wide bowl.) **2** | Cut 3 medium-ripe hass avocados (about 8 ounces each) in half. Twist the halves to separate them and remove the pit with the tip of the knife. Place an avocado half, cut side up, in your palm and make 3 or 4 evenly spaced lengthwise cuts through its flesh down to the skin, without cutting through the skin. Make 4 crosswise cuts in the same fashion. **3** | Scoop the diced avocado flesh into the molcajete. Repeat with remaining avocado halves. Gently fold the avocado into the chile-onion paste, keeping the avocado pieces fairly intact. **4** | Add 3 tbsp. diced tomato, 2 firmly packed tbsp. chopped fresh cilantro, and 1 tbsp. finely chopped white onion. **5** | Fold together all the ingredients. Taste and add salt, if necessary. **6** | Serve immediately, directly from the molcajete (or bowl), with tortilla chips. Makes 4 servings.



AVOCADOS

Know Your Avocados

Though the famously rich-tasting hass variety dominates the American market, hundreds of other types of avocado exist—all of them descended from three primary subspecies: West Indian, Guatemalan, and Mexican. Here are nine of our favorites.

1 | DONNIE Resembling a bright green papaya, the roughly six-and-a-half-inch-long donnie can weigh as much as one and a half pounds but has a surprisingly small seed, or pit. When this avocado is ripe, its thick skin is taut and shiny and, if the fruit rubbed against a branch as it matured, occasionally sports brown leathery patches. The donnie's light, mild flesh, low in fat, pairs well with richer ingredients such as cream and olive oil in velvety soups and salad dressings. Since it's so large, the donnie is the perfect avocado for stuffing, especially with crabmeat salad.

2 | ZUTANO This Mexican variety is ready to pick from late fall to early winter in the San Joaquin Valley in California. The medium-size (the fruits are usually about five inches long), pear-shaped zutano has a shiny, light green skin flecked with delicate white striations. The mild-tasting flesh, less rich than that of a hass, tastes great with a drizzling of extra-virgin olive oil and a little salt and pepper.

3 | FUERTE This Guatemalan-Mexican hybrid originated in the Mexican state of Puebla and was introduced in California in 1911. The fuerte earned its name—which means strong in Spanish—after it withstood a severe frost in California in 1913; it was the first avocado to be produced on a large scale in that state. Harvested from the late fall through the spring, the medium to large fruit (five or more inches long) has a smooth, shamrock green skin dappled with white specks. Inside, a medium-size seed is embedded in thick yellow flesh whose luscious flavor is reminiscent of hazelnuts'. The delicious fuerte is best eaten with little embellishment.

4 | MACARTHUR The large (often more than six inches long), pear-shaped macarthur—which originated in Monrovia, California, in 1922—has a paper-thin, pebbly skin that can be punctured easily and yellow-gold flesh that tastes slightly sweet and nutty. Available in the United States from August through November, it has a silky, firm pulp perfect for spreading and mashing and for puréeing into creamy smoothies or even ice cream.

5 | GWEN Bred from the hass variety in 1982, the gwen is a slightly larger, army green version of its darker-hued parent. Harvested from the late winter through the summer, the oval-shaped fruit, roughly four inches in length, has dense, gold-green flesh possessed of a buttery and slightly smoky flavor, somewhat akin to that of chipotle chiles. When the fruit is ripe, its green skin dulls slightly; refrigerated, the ripe fruit will keep for up to two and a half weeks, like its forebear the hass. The fatty, rich flesh of the gwen is delicious on its own or spread on bread like butter.

6 | BACON This generally five-inch-long, egg-shaped avocado has a smooth, delicate, pine green skin mottled with dots that darken faintly when the fruit is ripe. Developed by a farmer named James Bacon in 1954, the fruit is harvested from the late fall through the spring, though some believe it peaks in midwinter. The bacon's pale, yellow-green flesh tastes slightly sweet, clean, and faintly sharp. Try it tucked into a BBLT (bacon, bacon, lettuce, and tomato sandwich).

7 | HASS A Guatemalan-Mexican hybrid first planted in this country in 1926 by a California

postman named Rudolph Hass, this buttery variety has become the standard by which most Americans now judge avocados. The stout, teardrop-shaped fruit is the primary crop of most California avocado orchards; it can be harvested year-round and ships and stores well. Though its exact size and oil content depend on where it's grown, its average length is four and a half inches, and its skin is always a purplish black. The hass has creamy, pale green flesh that is resilient enough to hold its shape in dishes like the California roll but supple enough to be used in guacamole, to which it lends a nutty flavor that stands up beautifully to other, more robustly flavored ingredients like onions.

8 | FREY A Guatemalan variety, the frey typically weighs about a pound and resembles an oversize bartlett pear, usually just under six inches long. Its thick, speckled, yellow-and-forest green skin is as bumpy as a country road. Though its summer season is fleeting, the frey has a creamy flesh—which has a lingering, piquant flavor—and is worth seeking out. Try the frey as a garnish for grilled fish or as a filling for such Tex-Mex classics as burritos and hard-shell tacos.

9 | PINKERTON Shaped like a slender, elongated pear (specimens are generally six inches or longer), the pinkerton is prized for the intense flavor of its silky, almost puddinglike flesh. This cultivar, which was first grown on the Pinkerton Ranch in Saticoy, California, in the early 1970s, is harvested in that state in the winter through the spring. Ripeness is indicated by dark patches that form on the avocado's pebbly skin. The fruit's gold flesh has a high oil content and can be scooped from the skin effortlessly. Pinkertons are an excellent choice for omelettes. —A.N.



AVOCADOS

(continued from page 82) as 40 cents (roughly \$9 in today's money) at the turn of the 20th century. By the late teens and early '20s, American avocado growers had recognized the need to market their product more aggressively to everyday American consumers (see "Love Fruit", page 82).

Soon avocados began to appear in recipe books of the era, often thanks to the promotional efforts of growers, in dishes that would strike today's cook as decidedly dated. Cookbook writers and editors, keen to evoke the fruit's exoticism but either unable or unwilling to tap into authentic foreign cuisines, attempted to come up with recipes that suited the national palate but still had a whiff of tropical mystique.

RECIPE

Fajitas with Green Sauce

SERVES 6-8

Green sauce—originally from Ninfa's in Houston—is now a Texas standby. The recipe for this dish (facing page) is based on one that appears in *The Tex-Mex Cookbook* by Robb Walsh (Broadway Books, 2004).

- 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
- 1/4 cup pineapple juice
- 1/4 cup sherry
- 1/4 cup soy sauce
- 3 tbsp. butter, melted
- 1 tbsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 3 whole dried chiles de árbol, crushed
- 1 clove garlic, finely chopped
- Zest of 2 lemons
- Zest of 1 orange
- 2 skirt steaks (about 3 lbs.), trimmed and halved crosswise
- 6 tomatillos, husked and rinsed
- 2 small serrano chiles, stemmed
- 2 ripe avocados, such as hass, gwen, or frey (see page 85), peeled, seeded, and chopped
- 1/2 cup sour cream
- 1/4 cup chopped cilantro leaves
- Salt
- 6 tbsp. canola oil
- 2 red bell peppers, cored, seeded, and thickly sliced
- 2 yellow onions, thickly sliced
- Warm flour tortillas

1. Combine fruit juices, sherry, soy sauce, butter, pepper, chiles de árbol, garlic, and zests in a large dish; add steaks; turn to coat. Cover; marinate for 2 hours.

2. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add tomatillos and serrano chiles and cook until tender, 8-10 minutes. Drain and transfer to a blender. Add avocados; blend until smooth. Transfer to a large bowl and stir in sour cream, cilantro, and salt to taste. Cover surface with plastic wrap and refrigerate.

3. Heat 3 tbsp. oil in a large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Add peppers, onions, and salt to taste. Cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and beginning to char, 8-10 minutes. Transfer to a plate and set aside. Wipe out skillet. Heat 1 tbsp. oil in skillet over medium-high heat. Working in batches, cook steaks, flipping once, until well browned, adding remaining oil as needed, 7-8 minutes per batch. Transfer to cutting board, tent with foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Cut steaks crosswise into finger-size strips. Transfer to a platter, along with collected juices and peppers and onions. Serve with tortillas and green sauce.

Witness the Guatemalan avocado breakfast with claret and cracked ice and St. Thomas-style avocados with port or madeira and citrus juice from a 1912 *New York Times* article titled "Avocado Pear Recipes" and any number of dessert recipes that called for mixing avocados with sugar and sherry or deep-frying them.


Still, experimentation and innovation also yielded some longer-lasting results. A 1953 *New York Times* article noted that avocados combined well with almost any fish, an enduring observation indeed. Other recipes from the first half of the 20th century hailed the ability of the avocado to serve as a luscious binder in creamy dressings—a lighter and less oily alternative to mayonnaise—as well as the ways in which the fruit's oil-rich flesh married harmoniously with a wide variety of spices.

It was a single Mexican side dish, however, that definitively sparked mainstream America's passion for the fruit. Guacamole—which in its traditional form consisted simply of mashed avocados, onions, and tomatoes but could also include chiles, garlic, cilantro, lime juice, and, often, fruit as well—began to catch on as a party food in this country in the latter part of the 20th century. In her seminal 1972 book *The Cuisines of Mexico*, Diana Kennedy, one of America's foremost experts on Mexican foodways, wrote that guacamole is commonly served in Mexico with warm tortillas at the beginning of a meal. With the rise of Tex-Mex cuisine, salted, fried tortilla chips replaced fresh tortillas and helped guacamole "dip" become a tabletop staple in restaurants and bars.

The cover of a 1970 issue of *Sunset* magazine summed up guacamole's rising popularity: "It's endlessly versatile," it read. "It's a dip, a sauce, a dressing, a spread. It's guacamole." Americans from all over the country went wild for the tasty (and margarita-friendly) combination of crunchy, salty tortilla chips and cool, creamy avocado. Today Americans have made guacamole their own. On Super Bowl Sunday alone, nearly 55 million pounds of avocados are sold across the 50 states.

GUACAMOLE'S SUPERSTARDOM notwithstanding, more and more of us are beginning to embrace the avocado's infinitely broader culinary potential, as well as the remarkable variety of tastes and textures that American growers are now able to offer consumers. Many of these producers—like Aaron Lewis, a 37-year-old, second-generation avocado grower in Ventura, California—rely on a base crop of hass avocados (still the best-selling variety by a vast margin) while experimenting with lesser-known cultivars, testing the market and slowly creating demand. "Many kinds of avocados exist," says Lewis. "Just because people don't know them, they shouldn't shy away from trying them."

Another California grower, whom I visited recently, Dick Beckstead, lost almost 20 percent of his avocado crop to a freeze last January. But the 76-year-old farmer, based in Escondido, seemed unfazed as we walked through groves of avocado trees bearing varieties like fuerte, zutano, and hass. He was hopeful that, with proper nurturing, the injured trees would come back. "Look at these tiny buds," he said. "They're signs of life."

Before I left, Beckstead handed me a box of freshly picked fruit. "These are the best you've ever had," he said, pointing to a shiny, thin-skinned, and perfectly ripe zutano. When I got home, I rummaged through the box and pulled one out. Sitting at my kitchen table, I sliced it in half, popped out the pit, dug my spoon into the flesh, and slowly savored its rich, nutty taste—just as Dad taught me to. 

THE PANTRY, page 104: Sources for various kinds of avocado. See www.saveur.com/avocados for a recipe for salmon with avocado relish.

Aunt Carrie's
SEAFOOD RESTAURANT
Point Judith, Rhode Island

Shrines of Summer

ALONG THE SHORE OF RHODE ISLAND, CLAM SHACKS ARE HALLOWED INSTITUTIONS

BY LUCRETIA BINGHAM PHOTOGRAPHS BY LANDON NORDEMAN





CLAM SHACKS

M

AYBE IT'S BECAUSE OF OUR COLD winters, but I've found that we New Englanders tend to greet summer with a little more fervor than people from other parts of the country. When those first blazing days of June arrive, we practically throw ourselves at the beach, eager to have hot sand under our feet, to feel the scorch of the sun on our shoulders, and to savor the briny-sweet taste of the season's first tender fried clams. For me, eating clams by the sea is the purest expression of summer. And just as sacred as the food itself are the unpretentious institutions that serve it: clam shacks.

These convivial joints specializing in raw, fried, and stuffed clams, clam fritters, chowders, and, often, other classic summer fare like steamed whole lobster with fresh corn on the cob take advantage of the vast abundance of seafood—especially hard-shell and softshell clams—that thrives along the North American East Coast. Some of these places are bona fide shacks: wood-frame buildings that sit

astride a rickety dock or rise from a reedy shoreline. Others are multistoried shorefront restaurants with full bars and ample seating.

Worthy clam shacks that use fresh shellfish from local waters and serve their own, homemade chowders and clam cakes, or fritters, still exist in a number of New England states, but with all due deference to Connecticut, where I was born, on a recent clam shack quest I encountered the greatest concentration of them next door in Rhode Island. It was in the tiny Ocean State, specifically around the beaches and docks of Narragansett, that I rediscovered the types of clam shacks I remembered from my childhood—and, in fact, found a few that were better.

A customer on the deck at Champlin's, below. Facing page, clockwise from top left: measuring the catch; local color; clam digging in Narragansett Bay; fresh-caught steamers. Previous pages, clam cakes at Aunt Carrie's.



CLAM SHACKS



RHODE ISLANDERS HAVE long been fans of casual seaside dining. By the late 1800s, family gatherings and political functions frequently centered around the clambake, a ritual derived from the local American Indian tradition of cooking shellfish over hot stones on the beach. But Rhode Islanders, apparently, weren't content to limit the pleasure of eating lots of shellfish to special occasions; they "pined for an opportunity to enjoy this feast whenever they felt like it", as Horace G. Belcher put it in *The New England Yankee Cook Book*, published in 1939. "And so, in the latter part of the last century and in the earlier years of the present, the shores of upper Narragansett Bay were dotted with clambake resorts where bakes were served daily." By the 1920s, these clambake "pavilions" had begun to give way to take-out establishments—perfectly suited



to America's nascent automobile culture—as well as inexpensive, seafood-focused family restaurants.

Over the years, an influx of Italian and Portuguese immigrants to Rhode Island, combined with the state's strong sense of regional identity, has wrought a distinctly local cuisine that includes, among other dishes, clear and tomato-tinged chowders; stuffed, baked clams (known as "stuffies") made with linguica or chouriço sausage; garlicky conch salad; clam cakes; fried calamari tossed with hot peppers; and a special kind of fried dough balls akin to the Italian zeppola. (For a lexicon of Rhode Island food terms, see page 94.)

All these local marvels were on my must-eat list

LUCRETIA BINGHAM's most recent article for *SAVEUR* was "A Fine Virginian" (January/February 2007).

METHODS

Clam Cakes

(Clam Fritters)

These fritters (pictured on page 88) are the perfect side dish for chowder. This recipe is an adaptation of one in *The New England Yankee Cook Book* (Coward-McCann, 1939). Pour canola oil into a large pot to a depth of 2". Heat over medium-high heat until oil registers 350° on a deep-fry thermometer. Meanwhile, sift 1 cup flour, 4 tsp. baking powder, 1 tsp. salt, and 1/8 tsp. freshly ground black pepper into a bowl. Stir together 2 cups (about 3/4 lb.) chopped clams (preferably quahogs), 1/2 cup milk, 2 tbsp. melted butter, and 1 lightly beaten egg in a bowl. Add flour mixture to clam mixture and stir. Working in batches, carefully drop spoonfuls of batter (about 3 tbsp. each) into oil. Fry, turning once, until golden brown and just cooked through, 3–4 minutes. Transfer fritters to a paper towel-lined plate and sprinkle with salt. Makes 1 dozen.

Fried Clams

Amanda Maybeck, the restaurant manager at Champlin's, coats her fried clams (pictured on facing page) with a combination of bread crumbs and a batter mix made by Rhode Island-based Drum Rock Products. Pour canola oil into a large pot to a depth of 2". Heat over medium-high heat until oil registers 340° on a deep-fry thermometer. Meanwhile, combine 2 cups Drum Rock Fis-Chic Wonder Batter (see page 104) and 2/3 cup fine dried bread crumbs in a bowl. Drain 1 lb. (about 30) shucked whole softshell clams (called steamers). Working in batches, toss clams in bread crumb mixture, pressing gently to coat; shake off excess. Carefully drop clams into oil and fry until crisp, about 2–3 minutes. Transfer clams to a paper towel-lined plate, then sprinkle with salt. Serve immediately with lemon wedges. Serves 4–6.

CLAM SHACKS

RECIPE

Red Chowder

SERVES 6

When it comes to clam chowder, says Imogene Wolcott in *The New England Yankee Cook Book* (Coward-McCann, 1939), "Rhode Island and Connecticut housewives uphold the tomato. The rest of New England scorns it". This tomato version (right), a variation of Manhattan-style clam chowder, is based on one served at Champlin's in Narragansett, Rhode Island.

- 2 **tbsp. butter**
- 1 **medium yellow onion, chopped**
- 1/2 **tsp. Lawry's seasoned salt**
- 2 **cups chopped clams, preferably quahogs**
- 4 **cups bottled clam juice (if shucking quahogs, use their strained liquor to replace some of the bottled juice)**
- 4 **large white potatoes (about 13/4 lbs.), peeled and cut into 1/2" cubes**
- 1 **10 3/4-oz. can condensed tomato soup**
- 1/2 **cup canned tomato purée**
- 1/4 **tsp. cayenne**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- Oyster crackers**

Melt butter in a large pot over medium heat. Add onions and seasoned salt; cook until softened, 8–10 minutes. Add clams, clam juice, and 1 qt. water. Raise heat to medium-high; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover, and simmer for 30 minutes. Add potatoes and increase heat to medium-high; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; simmer until potatoes are almost cooked through, 6–8 minutes. Stir in tomato soup, tomato purée, cayenne, and salt and pepper to taste. Simmer until potatoes are tender, 8–10 minutes more. Ladle into soup bowls. (The chowder tastes even better when chilled overnight and reheated.) Serve with oyster crackers.

as I embarked on an exploration of the Narragansett Bay shore, but before I tried anything else, I yearned to satisfy a craving for the premier clam shack specialty, fried clams. Accordingly, my first stop was Champlin's Seafood Deck, a flag-festooned, two-story restaurant and fish market that allegedly serves some of the best fried clams in the state. I arrived midmorning, before the fryers had started up, so I perused the retail fish market on the ground floor while I waited. There I found Annie Senerchia, a sweatshirt-clad woman in her 40s who was working the fish counter. I noticed that, in addition to a huge variety of fish and prepared foods like conch salad and calamari salad, they sold quahogs—as Rhode Islanders call the larger, hardshell clams most commonly used for chowder—both whole and already chopped. "Even the old-timers buy them chopped. They don't want to shuck," Senerchia said.

I knew firsthand how tough it is to separate those sturdy bivalves from their shells, I told her, having



Rhode Island's Beloved Bivalves

The Ocean State's 400 miles of shoreline are blessed with an extraordinary bounty of seafood, but no catch is as quintessential as the hardshell clam, or quahog (variously pronounced kwuh-HOG and KO-hog). The state's shellfishermen landed more than a million pounds of quahogs last year, and Rhode Islanders consumed a substantial portion of those. The Atlantic hardshell clams harvested in Rhode Island's waters are almost all wild-caught and go by a variety of names, depending on their size: littleneck, cherrystone, and chowder (also called, confusingly, quahog). All are loved for their salty-sweet taste, which owes to the particular salinity, temperature, and ecological diversity of Rhode Island waters.

Rhode Island's Narragansett Bay, a glacially cut estuary dotted with islands and refreshed with a constant flow of seawater, has always been an especially rich breeding ground for quahogs, which take their name from *poquahock*, an Algonquin word meaning round clam. The Narragansett people—the original inhabitants of what is today Rhode Island—harvested quahogs in great quantities from the bay,

made beads from their shells, and used the beads for bartering, which explains their scientific name, *Mercenaria mercenaria*—from the Latin word for wages or reward.

When European settlers arrived in New England, they brought with them an appetite not for clams but for oysters, which by the late 19th century had become popular among the well-to-do vacationers who descended each summer on Rhode Island's shores, especially along Narragansett Bay. But as industry developed alongside tourism on the bay, pollution began to decimate its shallow-water oyster beds; the hurricane of 1938 destroyed those that remained. It was only after the demise of the local oyster industry, at the outset of World War II, that Rhode Island's shellfishermen turned to clams, which remained safely ensconced at the bay's bottom.

"At that time, there was no national market for clams," says Ted Blount, president of Blount Seafood, whose family has worked in Rhode Island's seafood industry since the 1880s. But after World War II, as vacationers returned to Rhode Island's shores and roadside seafood shacks sprang up to

serve them, clamming became a viable industry in Narragansett Bay. "Back then, it was all bay quahogs [large chowder clams]," says Blount. "Now we have to go offshore for sea clams because the only things left in the bay are cherrystones and littlenecks."

The methods used by Narragansett Bay's quahoggers—as clam diggers are called in Rhode Island—haven't changed much over the past century. Recreational quahoggers usually trudge into the estuaries at low tide and comb the sand with rakes, whereas the bay's commercial shellfishermen most often work from semi-flat-bottomed boats, pulling and maneuvering a rakelike device along the seabed and scooping the clams into a basket. The two other professional methods are tonging, in which diggers probe the sea floor with a giant, scissors-like tool, and (more commonly) diving.

Most quahoggers in Narragansett Bay work for themselves and own their equipment, and most say they love their work. Even those who are born to the trade but leave it to pursue other careers often return to Rhode Island's waters on weekends to do a little digging, either for fun

CLAM SHACKS

spent a foggy and cold summer on Martha's Vineyard as a teenager learning how to gather quahogs. Though many New Englanders collect clams by scouring the tidal flats using long-handled rakes, I wanted to find the big specimens that burrowed in deeper water. Wearing scuba gear, I would skim silently along the bottom of Vineyard Haven Harbor, trailing a mesh bag, looking for the telltale holes in the muddy sand.

Bob Mitchell Jr., the 35-year-old general manager of Champlin's, explained that the quahogs sold there, as well as the smaller littlenecks and steamers, are raked from salt ponds near Rhode Island's south shore or from Narragansett Bay and unloaded by boatmen directly into the restaurant's dock front warehouse.

At 11 o'clock I headed upstairs to the kitchen, where I met Amanda Maybeck, the restaurant manager, who was readying the day's first batch of clams. "We use small to medium-size steamers," said Maybeck, an athletic-looking 45-year-old, as she rolled the plump, fresh-shucked mollusks in a specially concocted bread-

ing mixture and dropped them into the hot oil. (Champlin's, like most respectable clam shacks, uses whole clams, including the tender bellies, though it also sells clam strips, made from the chewier siphon, or "neck", of ocean quahogs.) The clams sizzled furiously before the frying basket was removed and the clams were left to drain. Maybeck heaped a dozen onto a plate garnished with a lemon wedge and pointed me to a table. As gulls shrieked overhead in the midday sun, I popped a clam into my mouth and bit into the soft flesh. I was in heaven, and hungry for more.

I RESISTED THE TEMPTATION to down another dozen clams and decided to move on. My quarry was a local specialty called clam cakes—deep-fried clam fritters—and my destination was a huge restaurant called George's of Galilee, which is celebrated for its version of the dish. Every one of the 100-plus tables and five dining rooms at George's seemed to be filled when I arrived. It's hard to imagine that the place started out, in

For Rhode Islanders, eating clams by the sea is the purest expression of summer



A New England shellfisherman in the 1940s.

or to earn extra money or both. Still, the quahogger's life is not without its challenges. Before they were banned in Rhode Island waters in the 1950s, commercial dredging boats plowed up the bay's sea bottom to land bigger catches, making it harder for individual quahoggers to earn a living. More recently, huge aquaculture farms in states like Florida and Virginia, where clams grow faster in the warm waters, are driving prices to historic lows.

"Twenty years ago, there were a thousand quahoggers in Narragansett Bay, and they got about a quarter per piece," says David Beutel, a fisheries specialist at the Rhode Island Sea Grant at the University of Rhode Island, in Kingston. "Now there's only 120 full-time quahoggers, and they get about 15 cents a piece."

Still, the increasing abundance of relatively cheap clams from out-of-state sources has not undermined the loyalty of Rhode Island's clam shack owners and cooks, the majority of whom still buy only locally caught or grown shellfish whenever possible. Asked whether Rhode Island restaurateurs will soon have to give in to the rising tide of competition, Beutel scoffs. "No way," he says. "They'd be driven out of business if they didn't use local clams." —Dana Bowen

CLAM SHACKS

Restaurant owners "would be driven out of business if they didn't use local clams", says a fisheries specialist



Rhode Island Clam Shack Lingo

BOAT STEERER: Another name for a clam cake (see below).

CABINET: A milk shake.

CLAM CAKE: A flour or cornmeal fritter made with chopped clams.

CLEAR CHOWDER: Clam chowder in a clear seafood broth.

CHOURIÇO: A dry-cured Portuguese-style sausage often used in stuffies (see below).

COFFEE MILK: Ice-cold milk mixed with coffee syrup; Rhode Island's unofficial state drink.

DOUGHBOY: A deep-fried dough cake sprinkled with sugar; some locals dip theirs in chowder.

JOHNNYCAKE: A white-cornmeal skillet cake sometimes served alongside chowder.

LINGUIÇA: Another, milder dry-cured Portuguese-style sausage.

QUAHOG: A hardshell clam; also, specifically, a large clam used for chowder.

QUAHOGGER: One who digs for clams.

RED CHOWDER: Clam chowder in a tomato-based broth.

SINKER: Another name for a clam cake.

STUFFIES: Baked, stuffed quahogs.



1948, as a humble coffee shop that the original owner, a bakery-truck driver named Norman Durfee, bought from a guy named George Partelow. Norman's grandson, Kevin Durfee, now owns the place, I was told, and the clam cakes he sells are tasty and satisfying, but, alas, I found them to be heavier than I'd hoped.

Seeking perfection, I left George's and asked a man stepping into a pickup truck parked across the street where I could find the best clam cakes. "Go five miles up the road," he told me. "A place right next to the water called Starboard's. Puts the others to shame!" The Starboard Galley, as the place is officially known, has been around only since 1996 (and, since my visit, has moved to a new location, in Charlestown)—a fact I found surprising given the unequivocal vote of confidence the place got from a guy who looked to be a dyed-in-the-wool Rhode Islander and, as

RECIPE

Stuffies

(Stuffed Quahogs)

SERVES 6-8

This recipe is based on one in *The New England Clam Shack Cookbook* by Brooke Dojny (Storey, 2003).

- 15 slices white sandwich bread
- 3 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
- 3/4 lb. linguica (Portuguese sausage; see page 104), finely chopped
- 6 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 ribs celery, finely chopped
- 1 small yellow onion, finely chopped
- 1 green bell pepper, cored, seeded, and finely chopped
- 2 1/4 cups chopped clams, preferably quahogs
- 3/4 cup clam juice or strained clam liquor
- 6 tbsp. finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 3 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 1 1/2 tbsp. Tabasco
- 1 1/2 tbsp. worcestershire
- 6 tbsp. butter, cut into pats
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 16 empty large quahog half shells
- Paprika and lemon wedges

Heat oven to 275°. Pulse bread in food processor into fine crumbs. Transfer to a baking sheet and bake, tossing often, until dried, 15–20 minutes; set aside. Raise oven heat to 425°. Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add sausage, garlic, celery, onions, and peppers; cook until soft, 12–15 minutes. Add clams, clam juice, parsley, lemon juice, Tabasco, and worcestershire; bring to a boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; add butter. Add bread crumbs and salt and pepper to taste; stir. Divide stuffing between shells. Bake on a baking sheet until browned, 22–25 minutes. Sprinkle with paprika; serve with lemon wedges.

such, probably wary of upstart establishments.

The restaurant couldn't look more different from George's: the Starboard Galley was a cinder-block building with a tiny kitchen, a single take-out window, and a four-table dining room. My suspicions were further aroused by a sign above the entrance that read, "The Best Clamcakes and Chowda in Narragansett". (I recently learned that it has since been upgraded to read, "The Best Clamcakes and Chowda Anywhere".)

I ordered clam cakes and red chowder—Rhode Island's version of Manhattan-style clam chowder. The peppery tomato-based broth chock-full of chopped quahogs and white potatoes was good enough to put me off heavy, cream-based chowder

From top, the take-out window at Champlin's; littlenecks on the half shell. Facing page, a platter of stuffies.



CLAM SHACKS

The clam cakes were exquisite, with browned bits of quahog, crisp as bacon, peeking out of the fritters' golden crust


forever. But it was the clam cakes that really impressed me: they were as light as, well, cake and generously bejeweled with bits of tender clam. All suspicions were firmly laid to rest.

At that point I'd eaten enough to get me through to breakfast, but one more stop awaited me: Aunt Carrie's, south of Narragansett's town center, in Point Judith. It's here that clam cakes were allegedly invented, and I've heard many Rhode Islanders also speak reverently about the fried clams to be had at this shorefront restaurant, one of the oldest clam shacks in New England.

Aunt Carrie's could be called the grande dame of Rhode Island clam shacks. The wood floors of the dining room shine, and lace curtains billow elegantly in the afternoon breeze. The owner, Elsie Foy, married the grandson of Carrie and Ulysses Cooper, who founded the restaurant in 1920 on the site where the couple's family used to camp in the summertime.

Manager Ray VanHine started as a dishwasher at Aunt Carrie's 21 years ago and is now among the elite few who know the original clam cake batter recipe. "It's the holy grail!" he said. "Most of the other res-

taurants would love to know how we do it." He took me into the kitchen and showed me the three ancient-looking frying vats—known as Fryolators—they use to make the fritters. "During the summer all three Fryolators are going all day long," VanHine said, "frying about 120 clam cakes at a time."

I took a plate of clam cakes and a dozen fried clam bellies out to the restaurant's enclosed porch and found a seat next to two sunburned teenage girls in flip-flops. The fried clams—juicy and just the right size—were as good as any I'd ever had, and the clam cakes were exquisite, with browned bits of quahog, crisp as bacon, protruding from the golden crust. I glanced at the girls next to me, who were sharing a plate of the fritters. They went about their business silently, except when the one closer to me murmured, with her mouth full, "Real good." I couldn't have said it better. 

THE PANTRY, page 104: Sources for chopped quahogs, Drum Rock batter mix, shucked softshell clams, linguica sausage, and empty quahog half shells. See www.saveur.com/clamshacks for a recipe for indian pudding.

THE GUIDE

RHODE ISLAND

AREA CODE: 401

Dinner with drinks and tip:

EXPENSIVE Over \$25 MODERATE \$10–\$25 INEXPENSIVE Under \$10

WHERE TO STAY

FISHERMEN'S MEMORIAL STATE PARK CAMPGROUND

1011 Point Judith Road, Narragansett (www.riparks.com/fisherma.htm). Rates: \$14–\$35. Open April to October. This 90-acre park encompasses 182 campsites. It's hardly wilderness camping—RVs are welcome—but it's five minutes from the beach.

OCEAN ROSE INN 113 Ocean Road, Narragansett (783-4704; www.oceanroseinn.com). Rates: \$119–\$289. The main building of this stately old inn is a 110-year-old Victorian house, located just yards from the Atlantic Ocean.

WHERE TO EAT

AUNT CARRIE'S 1240 Ocean Road,

Point Judith, Narragansett (783-7930; www.auntcarriesri.com). Open April to September. Moderate. This family-owned institution is known for its extra-large clam cakes, but plenty of customers come just for the indian pudding (a custard-like dessert made with cinnamon and molasses).

THE BLACK PEARL BANNISTER'S WHARF Newport (846-5264; www.blackpearlnewport.com). Closed January and February. Expensive. An upscale but eminently comfortable option after you've clam-shacked your way across Rhode Island is the Black Pearl. One of the excellent chowders here is seasoned with dill and finished with vermouth.

CHAMPLIN'S SEAFOOD DECK 256 Great Island Road (on Galilee Harbor), Narragansett (783-3152; www.champlins.com). Open year-round. Moderate. There's no middleman at this waterfront restaurant and fresh-seafood market: the owners get their clams directly from the boats every day, and they use only Rhode Island clams for their fried dishes and chowders, which are duly legendary.

CHOPMIST CHARLIE'S 40 Narragansett Avenue, Jamestown (423-1020). Open year-round. Moderate. Stuffies (baked, stuffed quahogs) are the favorite dish here; the chef, Chris Olobri, browns them on a griddle to achieve a toothsome crust. For dessert, the apple crisp and key lime pie are musts.

EVELYN'S NANAQUAKET DRIVE-IN 2335 Main Road, Tiverton (624-3100; www.evelynsdrivein.com). Open April to October. Inexpensive. Founded 39 years ago, this restaurant serves an excellent "undressed" lobster roll on a hot dog bun with mayo on the side.

FLO'S CLAM SHACK 4 Wave Avenue, Middletown (847-8141). Open March to December. Moderate. This

local favorite is famous for its spicy stuffed quahogs, as well as superfresh raw littlenecks and fried clam bellies.

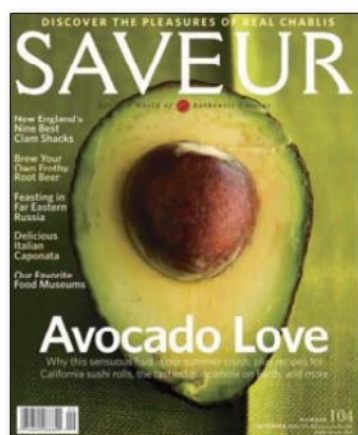
GEORGE'S OF GALILEE 250 Sand Hill Cove Road, Narragansett (783-2306; www.georgesofgalilee.com). Open year-round. Moderate. This bustling restaurant sells up to 12,000 clam cakes a day during the peak of the summer and has a lively bar scene.

IGGY'S DOUGHBOYS & CHOWDER HOUSE 889 Oakland Beach Avenue, Warwick (737-9459; www.iggysdoughboys.com). Open year-round. Moderate. A dependable source for chowder and clam cakes, Iggy's, which also has a location in Narragansett, is best known for the doughboy: a zeppola-like confection of fried dough.

STARBOARD GALLEY Charlestown Beach Road, Charlestown (364-7100). Open Memorial Day to Labor Day. Inexpensive. Recently relocated from Narragansett, this restaurant caters mostly to the take-out trade and is known for its outstanding chowders.

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FESTIVAL POSTER BY
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IN THE SAVEUR KITCHEN

Discoveries, Stories, and Techniques from Our Favorite Room in the House » Edited by Todd Coleman



Pop Flavor

METHOD

Root Beer Cake

Heat oven to 350°. Grease a 9" x 13" pan with 1 tsp. butter; dust with 1 tbsp. cake flour; tap bottom of pan to remove excess flour. Sift 2½ cups cake flour, 2½ tsp. baking powder, and 1 tsp. salt into a bowl; set aside. Whisk together 1 cup root beer and 2 tsp. root beer extract (preferably Zatarain's, see page 104) in a bowl; set aside. Beat 1½ cups sugar and 1 cup butter in a large bowl until fluffy. Add 4 room-temperature eggs one at a time, beating briefly after each addition. Alternately add flour mixture and root beer mixture, waiting for each to be incorporated before adding the next. Mix briefly, then transfer batter to pan; smooth out top. Bake, rotating once, until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean, about 30 minutes. Let cool. Put 4½ cups confectioners' sugar and 1 cup butter into a bowl; beat with an electric mixer to combine. Add 2 tbsp. cream and 1 tbsp. root beer extract; beat to make a fluffy frosting. Spread frosting on cake, making swirls and whorls. Decorate with root beer candies. Serves 6–8.

READING THIS MONTH'S article on root beer (page 38), I was reminded of a dessert I tasted a few years ago at a reunion of my husband's family in North Carolina: root beer cake. A sheet cake sweetened, in part, with root beer, it channeled that soft drink's matrix of flavors, including those of cinnamon, molasses, and vanilla. It seems that in North Carolina and other parts of the South, root beer shows up in all sorts of unexpected ways: as a glaze for ham, as a seasoning for barbecue, and as a zippy accent in Jell-O salads.

When, I wondered, did cooks first use the beverage in recipes? "I think it became popular in the '70s," speculated Sandy Bowen, the best baker in my family, when I called her in search of an answer. Not yet satisfied, I turned to Southern-food expert John T. Edge's *A Gracious Plenty* (Putnam, 1999), a compendium of Southern recipes and food history. Using soda pop for baking, Edge writes, is a "remnant of the World War II era, when sugar was rationed and the dark, sticky syrup used for fountain Cokes was pushed into service as a dessert sweetener."

Further sleuthing turned up previous instances of the practice. A promotional pamphlet issued by the Charles E. Hires Company, circa 1920, includes recipes for both root beer cake and root beer icing. Intrigued, I contacted Sylvia Lovegren, a chronicler of American foodways, who cited an even earlier date. "As far as I know, the first soda pop-enhanced recipe of any kind was Fannie Farmer's 1912 ginger ale gelatin salad," she told me. The soda pop movement was a grassroots one that took years, she added, to catch on. Whatever the exact trajectory of this culinary trend, it may have reached its peak in 1967, when a root beer cake was a finalist in that year's Pillsbury Bake-Off Contest. For all I know, it was made from the same recipe as that delicious cake I ate in North Carolina. —Dana Bowen

A Sloppy Mystery

Sloppy joes (see method, page 26) are an American culinary institution; cans of Manwich Original Sloppy Joe Sauce are as ubiquitous as packages of breakfast cereal on our supermarket shelves. But who was this “Joe” character, and was he really a slob? One popular account traces the origin of the sandwich’s name to a bar called Sloppy Joe’s, a Havana, Cuba, hangout during the first half of the last century. The Joe in question was the original owner, José Garcia, but it’s hard to determine what his grooming habits were. Another account puts the blame on a short-lived 1940s fashion trend,



the wearing of an oversize ladies’ sweater known as the sloppy joe; alas, we had a hard time connecting that article of clothing to the sandwich. To complicate matters, sloppy joes are also called by a plethora of other regional names, including “Spanish hamburger” in Wisconsin. Yeesh; sometimes it’s better to put down the history books and just eat! —Todd Coleman

KITCHEN

Bark with a Bite

Before we started testing the recipe for homemade root beer (see page 42), we were curious about its principal aromatic ingredient, sassafras. Wasn’t that substance illegal? Indeed, the FDA did ban safrole—a naturally occurring compound found in the oil of sassafras root bark—for commercial use, but it is still relatively easy to find sassafras in health food stores, where it’s sold as an anti-inflammatory. We wanted to see what the root bark looked like whole (it’s usually available only in its crumbled form), so we asked Jeff Nordhaus of H&K Products in Columbus Grove, Ohio, a maker of sassafras tea concentrate, to send us some. When it arrived, we were surprised to see that it resembled oversize cinnamon sticks. Nordhaus gets his sassafras root bark from foragers who harvest it in the Appalachian, Ozark, and Smoky mountains. “They unearth the roots from about a third of the tree,” he says. “All that good, sassafras flavor is in the rust-colored outer layer.” (See page 104 for a source for sassafras tea and bark.) —T.C.



Bitter Bliss

Encountering a bitter melon—a star ingredient in the Hmong chicken wings method on page 61—in an Asian market can be a perplexing experience. For starters, there are two readily available varieties: the Chinese type (pictured, left; also known by its Cantonese name, foo gwa), which has jade green skin and resembles a wrinkled cucumber; and the more roughly skinned, slightly darker-colored Indian version, known as karela. The former, which ranges in length from eight to 16 inches, is available at most Asian grocers; the latter, which is from two to eight inches long, can generally be found only at shops selling Indian produce. With both, the darker green the vegetable, the more bitter it tends to be. But those are the ones we like the most. —Andrea Nguyen



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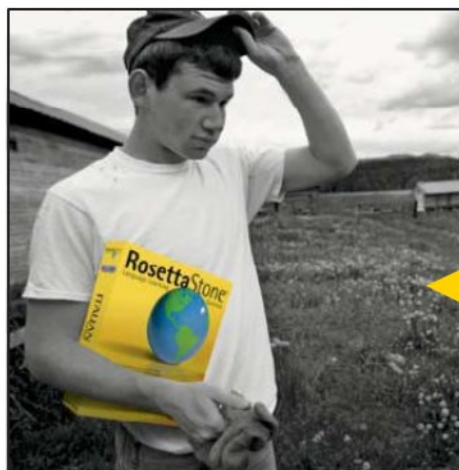
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KITCHEN

From Russia, with Bubbles

When people think of beverages popular in Russia, vodka is usually the first one that springs to mind. But kvas, a faintly sour-tasting, lightly fermented drink (it has a barely perceptible alcohol level that ranges from 1 to 2 percent), is perhaps just as celebrated. In cities across Russia it is sold from large portable tanks by street vendors who offer on-the-spot swigs of the drink, as well as in bottles (pictured, right) found on grocery store shelves. Though kvas is generally drunk without embellishment (and never served iced), it finds its way into a handful of Russian dishes, including okroshka (see page 67), a chilled vegetable and beef soup whose pleasingly malty taste and gentle fizz are derived from the beverage.

Kvas's name stems from the Russian verb *kvasit*, which means to sour. In days gone by, the beverage was often brewed in people's homes; cooks made it from water and a mixture of whatever grains were on hand (most commonly rye, and sometimes rye bread). Some versions were spiked with beets or fruit. Herbs, such as mint, were often added for an extra dimension of flavor. Nowadays, most commercially made kvas (it's widely available in the United States in shops catering to a Russian clientele) is in-

tensely sweet—marking an effort, perhaps, by manufacturers of the drink to compete with the growing popularity in Russia of beverages like Coca-Cola. Even these somewhat inauthentic, soft drink-like versions are quite tasty, though. Russian meals—and okroshka—aren't complete without kvas. (See page 104 for a source for kvas.) —Liz Pearson



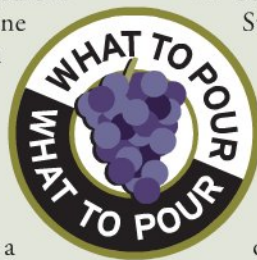
WINE AND DRINK SUGGESTIONS INSPIRED BY THE FOODS IN THIS ISSUE

This is the first installment in a new column by SAVEUR's wine editor, Paul Lukacs.

AWINE'S TEXTURE IS as important a concern as its flavor when you're considering what foods to pair it with. Accordingly, dishes that include a creamy-textured ingredient like avocado benefit from a wine that feels similarly rich when you drink it. A Jean-Baptiste Adam Adam 2005 Reserve Riesling from Alsace (\$20), for example, tastes appealingly lush when drunk with the guacamole on page 83. With a more refined avocado dish such as the lobster and avocado salad on page 82, try a drier wine—like a Chehalem 2006 "INOX", a ripe but citrus-scented unoaked chardonnay from Oregon (\$24)—that will allow the food's subtleties to come to the fore but still feel weighty. By contrast, the fajitas on page 87 need a full-bodied red to stand up to the steak without overpowering the creamy, avocado-based sauce; a

deep but supple California merlot like the Ferrari-Carano 2004 from Sonoma County (\$25) would do the trick. The baked salmon with mayonnaise on page 73 also calls for a fuller-bodied wine. If you're thinking white, try a barrel-aged semillon like L'Ecole No. 41 Columbia Valley from Washington State 2006 (\$14); it will feel silky when paired with this dish. If you opt for red, try a light but velvety pinot noir, such as the Tamar Ridge "Devil's Corner" 2005 from Tasmania (\$16).

The texture of a wine is especially important when it's matched with shellfish. While clams on the half shell call for a crisp, light white, dishes like the clam cakes on page 91 and the stuffies on page 94 will be enhanced by a wine that offers depth as well as verve. An albariño like the Finca de Arantei 2006 from Rias Baixas in northern Spain (\$22) has an almost waxy quality, so it won't be overwhelmed by the briny flavor of the clams. —PAUL LUKACS, Wine Editor



KITCHEN

THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

*In producing the stories for this issue,
we discovered food products and
kitchenware too good to keep to ourselves.
Please feel free to raid our pantry!*

BY LIZ PEARSON

Fare

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List

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Cellar

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for the Joseph Drouhin Chablis-Montmains Premier Cru; Vineyard Brands (205/980-8802) for the Laurent Tribut and the Louis Michel & Fils Grand Cru Les Clos and Premier Cru Forêts; and Henriot Inc. (212/605-6700) for the William Fèvre "Champs Royaux" and Grand Cru Les Clos Domaine.

Drink

If you're embarking on a **root beer** road trip, stop at Mug 'n Bun Drive-In (5211 West Tenth Street, Speedway, Indiana; 317/244-5669), Triple XXX Family Restaurant (2 North Salisbury Street, West Lafayette, Indiana; 765/743-5373), and Sprecher Brewery (701 West Glendale Avenue, Glendale, Wisconsin; 414/964-7837; www.sprecherbrewery.com), whose root beer can be ordered online. You may also order a variety of root beers, including Gale's root beer, from POP the Soda Shop (480/994-4505; www.popsoda.com). To make your own, order dried **birch bark** (\$2.50 for a 2-ounce bag), dried **sarsaparilla root** (\$3.45 for a 2-ounce bag), dried **sassafras root bark** (\$2.50 for a 1-ounce bag), and dried **licorice root** (\$2.10 for a 1-ounce bag) from Leeners (800/543-3697).

Classic

Market Hall Foods (888/952-4005; www.markethallfoods.com) sells Maria Grammatico **tomato paste** (\$10 for a 100-gram jar) for making the Sicilian sweet-sour vegetables.

Clam Shacks

Gardner's Wharf Seafood (401/295-4600) sells chopped **quahog clams** (\$5.99 per pint) for making the clam fritters, red chowder, and stuffed quahogs, as well as whole shucked **softshell clams** (price varies) for making the fried clams and empty **quahog shells** (\$0.35 per pound) for making the stuffed quahogs. Order Drum Rock Fis-Chic **Wonder Batter** (\$1.50 for a 1-pound bag) from Drum Rock Products (401/737-5165) to make the fried clams. Buy **linguiça sausage** from your local butcher for making the stuffed quahogs, or order some (\$6.50–\$8.50 per pound) from Gaspar's (800/542-2038).

Vladivostok

RussianFoods.com (www.russianfoods.com) sells **kvas** (\$3.80 for a 2-liter bottle) for the Russian chilled vegetable soup.

Avocados

Look for various **avocados** at your local markets, or order such varieties as hass and pinkerton from Will Brokaw (831/761-9086; www.willsavocados.com) and bacon and macarthur from Melissa's/World Variety Produce (800/588-0151; www.melissas.com). To find donnie and other varieties of avocado grown in Florida or for more details on the seasonality of Florida's avocado varieties, visit www.brookstropicals.com/saveur.

Hmong Farmers

Melissa's/World Variety Produce (800/588-0151; www.melissas.com) sells **bitter melon** for the stir-fried bitter melon with chicken wings, **chinese mustard greens** (ask for "gai choy") for the chinese mustard greens soup, and **angled luffa** for the stir-fried angled luffa with beef. Call for pricing details. Also for the chinese mustard greens soup, order Hmong **smoked pork** (\$6.99 per pound) from Pa Lee Thao, who accepts orders via fax (559/253-1975). Note that he sells delicious smoked beef (\$7.99 per pound) as well. As Thao doesn't accept credit cards, you'll be billed for the product and shipping charges.

Kitchen

Zatarain's (888/264-5460; www.zatarains.com) sells **root beer extract** (\$1.80 for a 4-ounce bottle). H&K Products Inc. (419/659-5110; www.sassafrastea.com) sells Pappy's **sassafras tea concentrate** (\$8.99 for three 12-ounce bottles). To order dried **sassafras root bark**, see Drink (above). Buy **bitter melon** and **karela** (prices vary) from Melissa's/World Variety Produce (800/588-0151; www.melissas.com). To buy **kvas**, see Vladivostok (above).

Corrections

The photos on pages 48, 52, 60, 61, 62, and 63 of our June/July 2007 issue were taken by André Baranowski. • Owing to a production error, an article on steak in the June/July issue misstated the century when Spaniards first brought to North America the herd from which Texas Longhorns were descended. It was the 16th century, not the 19th century.

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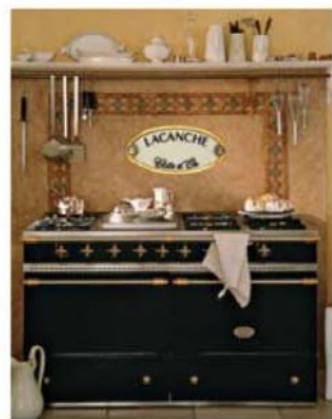
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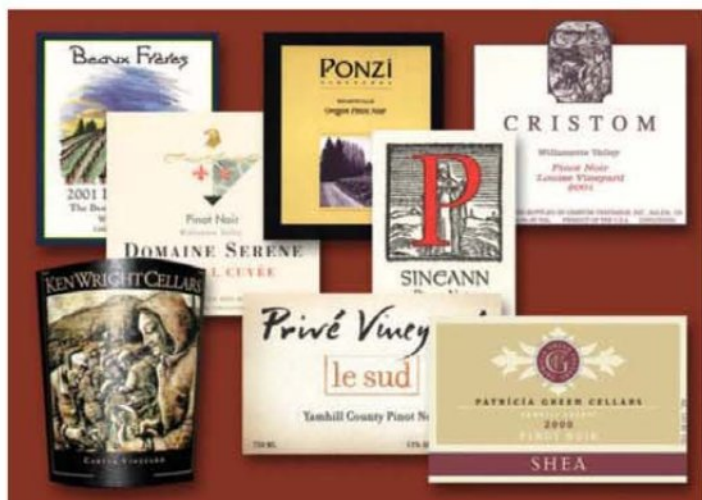


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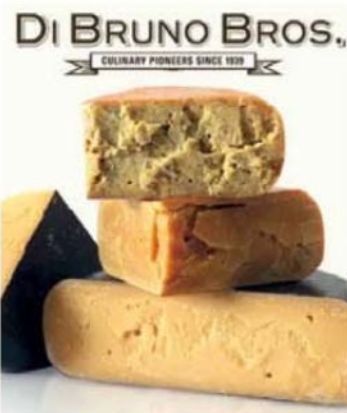
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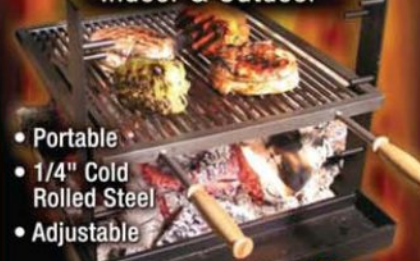
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TIME 9:00 A.M., August 15, 2006

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A portrait in corn of the late, great (and, occasionally, mallet-wielding) Julia Child.

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